



ICELANDERS in the VIKING AGE

THE PEOPLE OF THE SAGAS



WILLIAM R. SHORT

Icelanders in the Viking Age



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Frontispiece: *Grettis saga* tells the story of Grettir sterki (the strong), a powerful fighter who battled and triumphed over berserks, ghosts, grave-dwellers, and Vikings, as well as over many ordinary men. Towards the end of his life, Grettir and his brother Illugi lived in exile on the island of Drangey. With its sheer cliffs rising some 650 feet (200 meters) out of the deep waters of Skagafjörður, the brothers were safe from any attack, as long as they pulled the ladder up each night. One night, while Illugi tended his injured brother, their servant Glaumr fell asleep after forgetting this important duty. Þorbjörn öngull (hook) and his men easily climbed to the top of the island and killed both Grettir and Illugi (author photograph).

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On the cover: Woman in Saga Age Icelandic dress (Photograph by Andrew Frolovs, Australian National Maritime Museum)

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Introduction

Landnámabók, an Icelandic history book written in the 12th century, tells us that a Viking named Naddoddr boarded his ship in Norway. He sailed west, expecting to make landfall in the Faroe Islands. He didn't arrive.

Instead, his ship was blown off course, and he found himself at the coast of an unknown land. He and his crew came ashore and climbed a tall mountain, looking for smoke or other signs of life. They saw none and concluded the land was uninhabited.¹

Naddoddr sailed back east, eventually arriving at the Faroes. He and his crew told others of the land they had found. Thus began the Viking-age exploration and settlement of Iceland. Only seventy years later, the land was fully occupied, home to perhaps 40,000 people.

The society these settlers established would prove unique in a number of ways. Iceland was uninhabited at the time of discovery, and the land was settled without conquest, and seemingly without the involvement of any established monarchy or aristocracy. The Icelandic society developed into a form unique in medieval Europe, free of the great divide between wealthy, powerful aristocrats and the remainder of the population. Most Icelanders appear to have been free farmers, and many owned the land they farmed.

Icelanders embarked on a grand experiment in governing themselves and invented a unique form of government. They avoided a central authority figure and allowed active participation by an unusually broad cross-section of the population. The laws and governmental system were so unusual that they elicited comments from contemporary Europeans: in the words of the 11th century chronicler Adam of Bremen, "They have no king, only the law."² The grand experiment was a success, lasting for nearly four centuries.

In addition to forming a unique new state, medieval Icelanders also excelled in the literary arts. During the Viking era, Icelanders featured prominently as the court poets to Scandinavian kings, and their verses preserved the memory of eminent people and events of the day. After the Scandinavians adopted a written culture at the close of the Viking age, it was Icelandic authors who wrote down the legends, poems, and histories inherited from their Viking ancestors. Atypically, they wrote not in Latin, but in the vernacular: old Icelandic.



Iceland's first monastery was founded in 1133 at Þingeyrar in north Iceland. The monastery was a center of learning and had a library and a scriptorium. Some, and possibly many, of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts were produced here. It's likely that some of the sagas were created in written form for the first time here. The monks who wrote these stories may not have been young holy men seeking a sheltered monastic life, but rather, grizzled veterans of countless feuds and battles hoping to save their souls before their deaths. These men would have been all too familiar with the harsh realities of life in medieval Iceland. Today, a nineteenth century stone church stands on the site (author photograph).

The Icelanders invented a new form of literature and created engrossing stories about the people who settled Iceland and who formed and lived in the new state under the new government. These stories are called *Íslendingasögur* (*Sagas of Icelanders*), and they remain fabulously entertaining reading today.

The Icelanders preserved these works through the Middle Ages and beyond. When scholars in the modern age began to take an interest in the history of Scandinavian and Germanic culture, Iceland's written legacy offered a window on a world that would otherwise largely have been lost. Even today, we see the Vikings largely through an Icelandic lens.

This book serves as a companion to the *Sagas of Icelanders*. The authors of the sagas expected their readers to have knowledge of the culture, society, and history of the Icelanders who settled and built up their new land. That period in Iceland's history is often called the *saga age*, the period when the events depicted in the sagas took place. Broadly, it covers from the 9th century, when Iceland was discovered and the first settlers arrived from Norway, through to the end of the 11th century, when the Viking age came to an end in Europe.

Modern readers cannot be expected to possess the same background information about the culture in which the saga-age Icelanders lived as did the original saga audience. Without that knowledge, the activities of saga characters can be mysterious and irrational.

For example, the young poet Einarr Helgason left a fabulous gift for his friend, the elder poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson. When Egill came home and found out about the gift, he was furious and ordered his farmhands to saddle his horse so he could ride after Einarr and kill him.³

Why this homicidal response to a generous gift? By leaving the shield, Einarr obliged Egill to give a gift in return: in Egill's case, a gift of a poetry. Egill was incensed by Einarr's impudence toward an elder poet of importance such as himself. After Egill calmed down, he composed a poem in honor of Einarr, and the two remained friends for the rest of their lives.⁴

This book serves to introduce the modern reader to the Icelanders of the sagas, answering questions about their daily lives and their material culture. What did they do for work? What did they do for fun? How did they keep a roof over their heads? Clothes on their backs? Food in their bellies?

In addition, the book provides an overview of the history, culture, and society of saga-age Icelanders. What gods did they worship? How did they worship? What was the expected behavior of saga-age Icelanders? What behavior was admired? What was shameful? How did they govern themselves? How were disputes settled? How was news disseminated? What were the major milestones in the life of an Icelander in the saga age?

The sagas are written in a sparse but sophisticated style and are filled with highly believable characters, events, and settings. One might think, therefore, that the history, culture, and society of saga-age Iceland would be well known. To the contrary, the available sources are few and contradictory, and thus our knowledge of saga-age Iceland is limited. Something as fundamental to the stories as the nature of the settlement and the division of the land by the early settlers remains unclear. The literary sources and archaeological sources do not agree on important points.

Throughout the book, I have used a number of sources of information, including these literary sources and archaeological sources. In addition, I have employed several conventions in using Icelandic words and names. To avoid later confusion, it's worthwhile introducing those sources and conventions here.

Icelandic names. In the text, I make extensive use of Icelandic place names and personal names. I've left the place names in the original Icelandic, so, for example, I use *Hvítá*, rather than *White River*.

Place names are often descriptive, and as a result, many Icelandic places frequently share the same name. As examples, there are multiple places known as *Haukadalr* (Hawk Valley), *Álptafjörður* (Swan Fjord), and *Jökulsá* (Glacier River).

Iceland is traditionally divided into four *quarters*, named for the cardinal points of the compass. In the text, I've tried to identify which quarter each place is located, although even that precaution is sometimes insufficient to identify a place uniquely.

I've used the spelling of names as they appears in *Íslenzk fornrit*, the standard scholarly edition of the Icelandic literature. This spelling differs from that used in modern editions and is not always consistent from saga to saga.

The Icelandic language uses a number of letters not present in modern English. Notably, there are two additional consonants: the sound of “th” as in *Thor*, which is represented by þ (thorn); and the sound of “th” in *father*, which is represented by ð (edh).

The Icelandic language has many more vowel sounds than English, represented by accents (á), ligatures (æ), and diacritical marks (ö). Readers are welcome to pronounce these sounds as they wish; there are no English equivalents.

Icelandic is a highly inflected language, so the form of a word varies depending on its use in a sentence. I know I have not always been consistent, but I've tried to use names in the nominative case, rather than using the root as done by some English-language authors. I create the possessive form from the nominative as in English, thus when talking about the farm of Kári, I use *Kári's* farm, rather than the Icelandic *Kára*.

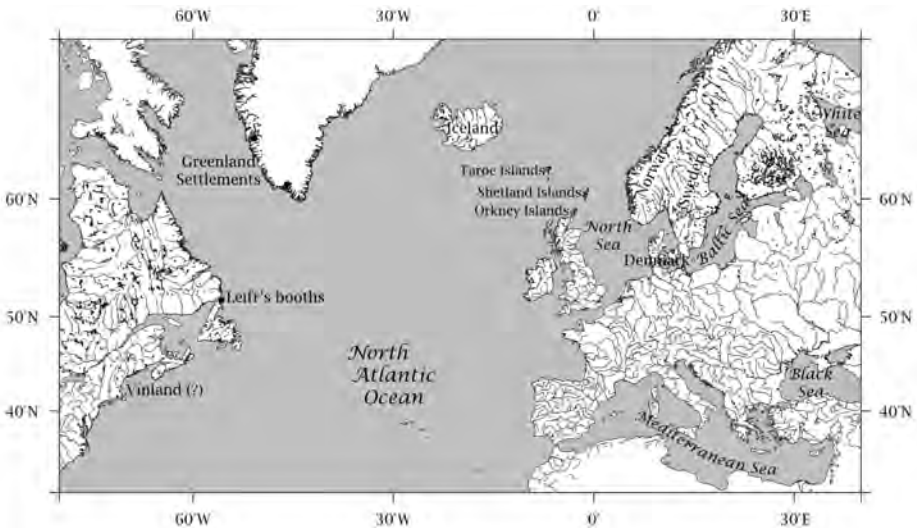
Northern people in the Viking age did not use family names, a practice commonly followed in Iceland today. Infants were given a single name, which was combined with a patronymic. Thus, the boy born to Skalla-Grímr and Bera was named Egill, which was combined with his patronymic: Skalla-Grímsson (son of Skalla-Grímr). Egill Skalla-Grímsson married Ásgerðr Bjarnardóttir (Ásgerðr, daughter of Björn), who retained her patronymic after marriage. Their children included Böðvarr Egilsson (Böðvarr, son of Egill) and Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir (Þorgerðr, daughter of Egill).

People's names sometimes changed over their lifetimes. Þorgrímr Þorgrímsson was a troublesome child, so he was called Snerrir, and later Snorri,⁵ names which have the connotation of a contentious, troublesome man.

Some people earned a nickname for themselves, such as Helgi enn magri Eyvindarson (Helgi the lean, son of Eyvindr). He was placed into fosterage in the Hebrides as a young boy. He was so starved during his stay there that when his parents came to pick him up two years later, they barely recognized him. They took him away and called him Helgi the lean.⁶ Helgi later became one of the prominent early settlers of Iceland.

The nicknames are useful, because they provide important information about a saga charter's background and attributes. The characters of Auðr en djúpauðga (the deep-minded) and Eiríkr rauði (the red) and Þorgrímr tordýfill (dung-beetle) are made more clear by their nicknames.

Available sources. Iceland was settled in the Viking age and was part of the diaspora-like movement outward from northern European lands in that



As the 8th century drew to a close, Nordic people began traveling outside of their Scandinavian homelands, a move that signaled the start of the Viking age. These people touched upon virtually every land and sea shown on this map. Raiders harried the coasts from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. Traders ranged from the White Sea to Byzantium. Explorers sailed the Atlantic to North America and along her coasts. Pilgrims traveled to the Holy Land.

era. Thus, Iceland shares many cultural elements with other northern Europeans and their lands. The Viking lands include Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, as well as Baltic lands, and the North Atlantic settlements of the Viking people, including the Faroe Islands, the Orkney Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and others. Additionally, Viking-age people made significant incursions into the British Isles and Ireland. Some of the Icelandic settlers arrived by way of these lands.

As a result it is possible to draw on sources not only from Iceland, but from these other lands touched by the Viking people. These sources must be used with care, since these lands differed in some significant ways from Iceland, and so the people and society differed as well. Nonetheless, these sources can fill gaps missing in the Icelandic records and provide insight and additional illumination on the Icelandic sources.

Literary sources. As will be discussed in detail in the chapter on literature, saga-age Icelanders did not have a written culture. Poetry was the vessel through which the shared culture was communicated orally.

After the end of the saga age, Icelanders embraced a book-based culture, and they created a torrent of written works beginning in the early part of the 12th century. Atypically for Europe, these works were not written in Latin, but in the vernacular: old Icelandic. The Icelanders wrote not just the *Sagas of Ice-*

landers, but also histories of Iceland, genealogies of Icelanders, histories of the Scandinavian kings, law books, hagiographies, and translations into Icelandic of literature and scholarly works from Europe.

All this written Icelandic material was created after the end of the saga age. This material, though composed by Icelanders, was written by people from a changed culture; their lives, their outlook, their government, and their religion all differed from those of saga-age Icelanders. For example, the authors were all Christians, yet most of the people from the saga age were heathens. Without a doubt, the Viking-age pagan world about which the Christian authors wrote was filtered through their own outlook on life and the world in which they lived.

The literary sources must be used with great care as a historical source, given the centuries that separate the authors from their subjects, and the changes that had taken place in Icelandic culture and society. While the broad outlines of the stories may be based on actual events and historical characters, the details are obscured by time and were certainly manipulated to suit the authors' literary needs. The literary sophistication of the stories is itself dangerous, since it is easy to be seduced by the authors' highly believable characters, events, and settings. Regardless, there is clearly a considerable body of genuine historical information embedded in these texts, and they remain one of the most important reference points for understanding the saga age.

In other lands, authors contemporary with the saga age were writing histories which occasionally touched upon the Viking people and their activities and homelands. Some of these sources are useful in studying saga-age Iceland.

Archaeological sources. During most of the saga age, the vast majority of Icelanders were heathens, and their burial practices included being interred with grave goods: items they used in daily life. We can study these grave goods and form a picture of the kinds of artifacts Icelanders used in the saga age. Well over 100 pagan graves have been studied in Iceland, along with other artifacts found accidentally.⁷ Archaeological research at house sites yields further information about living conditions in the saga age.

Icelandic archaeology has been criticized for being in the service of the literary sources. In the past, it's been suggested that archaeologists took the sagas as something close to historical fact, and they used archaeological sources to verify the sagas. In more recent years, that approach has been turned on its ear, and archaeological studies have been used independently of the sagas and have been shown to contradict some saga evidence.

While the archaeology can tell us about the artifacts, it is more difficult to determine how the artifacts were used. More recent archaeological practices and analyses have been able to shed much more light on this area than was possible in the past.

Iceland has a unique and invaluable archaeological tool: *tephrochronology*. Iceland's volcanoes lay down unique signatures of ash layers (*tephra*) in the soil.

An artifact's location in relation to these layers allows archaeologists to date it. If a structure is found below one of these layers, it's clear that the structure pre-dates the eruption that formed that layer.

For example, *Landnámabók* says that Ingólfr Arnarson, the first settler, arrived in the year 874.⁸ There is a unique ash layer called the Settlement Layer (*landnámslag*) that shows up in the turf of the earliest houses. This ash layer lies below a recently excavated settlement-age house found below the streets of Reykjavík, but above one of the walls near the house, implying that the wall was built at a very early date in Iceland's history, while the house dates from a later time.⁹ The Settlement Layer has been dated from ice cores in Greenland to 871±2 years,¹⁰ suggesting the date in *Landnámabók* is not off by more than a year or two.

Other archaeological finds that tell us about the way of life in saga-age Iceland are pollen populations. Pollen analysis shows a significant change in vegetation, from birch trees to grasses and cereal grains, immediately adjacent to the Settlement Layer, confirming that the settlers brought with them an agriculture based on grain.¹¹

Bones from animal species tell us about the animals that were raised and consumed. Bones from humans tell us about the health of the population. Skeletal remains having battle injuries tell us about weapons use.

Pictorial sources. Little pictorial art, either of the Vikings or by the Vikings, survives. What does survive includes stone carvings, such as memorial stones; wood carvings; embroideries; and jewelry and other cast metallic figures. These images tend to be representations of Norse mythological and heroic tales, but they can tell us about clothing and adornment, about ships, and about weapons.

Other contemporary European cultures also created pictorial art that has survived. Although this art depicts people from a different society, the art can be useful in filling in the gaps. Examples include Anglo-Saxon manuscript illuminations and artifacts such as the Bayeux tapestry depicting Norman and Anglo-Saxon people.

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CHAPTER 1

The Land

The land Naddoddr discovered is an island of 40,000 square miles (103,000 square kilometers) situated in the North Atlantic Ocean, midway between Norway and Greenland.¹ The land is young and geologically active. It lies on the boundary between the American and Eurasian tectonic plates, resulting in volcanic and tectonic forces that alter the surface from below. It is also located well to the north, so the glaciers remaining from the last ice age continue to work on the surface from above. Together, the forces of fire and ice have sculpted a dramatic landscape.

To the east, north, and west, the coastline is dominated by fjords. In the south, broad sandy coasts prevail, created by silt carried in the melt water from glaciers in the highlands above. Much of the interior is uninhabitable, consisting of high mountainous plateaus, partially covered by glaciers and tundra-like heaths, far from the warmth of the adjacent ocean currents. Extensive lava fields cover portions of the island.

Naddoddr and his crew came ashore in the East Fjords. As they departed, they saw snow on the mountains, so they called the land *Snæland* (Snowland). According to *Landnámabók*, Naddoddr and his crew praised Snæland on their return to inhabited Scandinavia, in spite of the unpromising name they had given it.²

We will never know what Naddoddr and his followers actually said, but their reports were favorable enough to encourage subsequent exploration. Within the next few years, Garðarr Svávarsson, a man of Swedish stock, set out in search of Snæland. He sailed around the country, proving it to be an island. According to *Landnámabók*, this voyage briefly gave Iceland the name *Garðarshólmr* (Garðarr's island), "and it was wooded from the mountains down to the sea."³

Garðarr built a house and spent the winter at Husavík, in the north, before sailing back to Norway in the spring. As he departed, a boat drifted away from the ship, with a man called Náttfari on board, along with a slave and a bondswoman. They were left behind. They settled in Náttfaravík in the north and eventually were driven away by later settlers.⁴ Perhaps because their land claim



Iceland's landscape has been shaped by the forces of fire and ice, in the form of its volcanoes and its glaciers. In some places, such as at the Vatnjökull glacier shown, both forces are at work simultaneously. Active volcanoes lie completely buried below the ice. When they erupt, they create table mountains, seen all over Iceland. The glacial meltwater carves deep canyons and lays down sandy wastelands. Glaciers create valleys which, when submerged, become fjords (author photograph).

was defective, or perhaps because they were accidental settlers, they are not counted among Iceland's first permanent settlers.

A third voyage of discovery was led by Flóki Vilgerðarson, who sailed from Norway in search of Garðarshólmr some time around the late 860s. According to *Landnámabók*, Flóki brought three ravens with him on the voyage. As he sailed across the Atlantic, he released the first raven, which flew to the stern and stayed there. Later in the voyage, the second raven was released. It flew up in the air, but it later returned to the ship. Still later, a third raven was released. It flew away from the ship and didn't return. Flóki steered his ship in that direction and came to land.

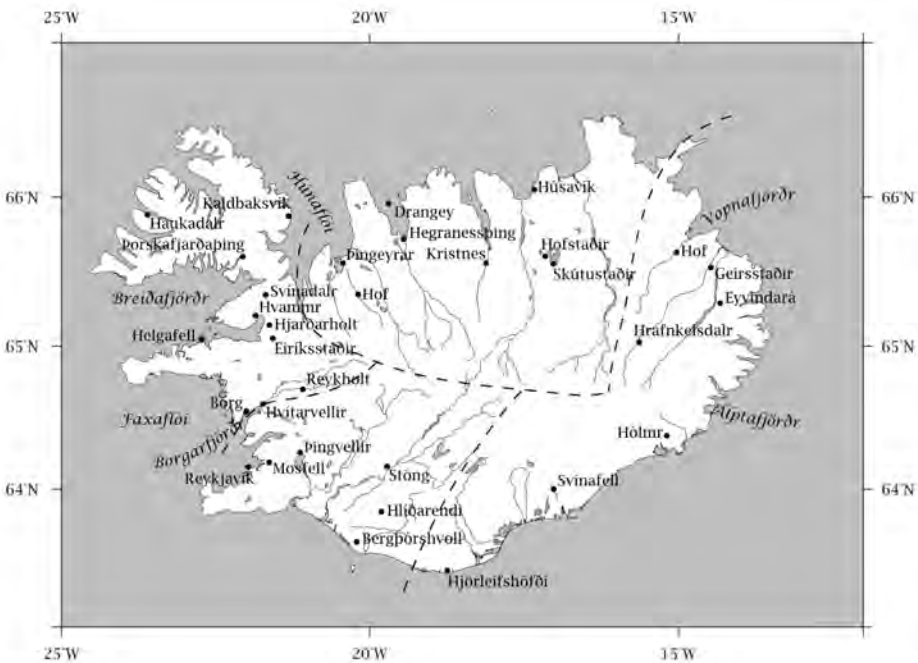
Flóki and his crew sailed along the south coast, then along the west coast, stopping for the winter in Vatnsfjörðr. He and his men got so caught up with the abundant fishing in the fjord that they neglected to bring in hay, and all their livestock perished over the winter.⁵

In the spring, Flóki climbed a high mountain and saw a fjord full of drift ice to the north. He called the land *Ísland* (Iceland), the name that finally stuck.

The following summer, Flóki and his crew tried to sail back to Norway, but unfavorable winds prevented them from getting any farther than Borgar-

fjörðr on the west coast. They stayed the second winter there, and returned to Norway the following spring. Flóki had little good to say about Iceland, but one of his crew, a man called Þórólfr, felt differently. He said that every blade of grass dripped with butter,⁶ an attractive image at a time when butter was the means for long term storage of excess dairy production. Butter represented wealth and easy living during lean times.

In fact, the belt of Iceland between the coast and the highlands is fertile and capable of sustaining a variety of farming activities. Arable land existed not only along the coast, but well inland along the many river systems and in the protected valleys. Meadows and grasslands grew abundantly when the settlers first arrived, promising pasturage for the livestock. Although the growing season is relatively short, the climate is moderated by ocean currents. The warm North Atlantic Drift passes to the south and around the island, while the cooler East Greenland Current passes to the north. At present, mean temperatures range from 37 to 46 degrees F (3 to 8 degrees C).⁷ Variation between winter



By the beginning of the 10th century, Iceland was fully settled. While productive farming was possible along the coasts and in protected inland valleys, much of the interior was comprised of uninhabitable wastelands and glaciers. The land was divided into four administrative quarters named for the cardinal points of the compass. A national assembly, Alþing, was established at Þingvellir. A few of the saga-age sites mentioned in the text are shown on the map.

mean and summer mean is limited to about 18 degrees F (about 10 degrees C), thanks to the moderating effect of the ocean currents. Evidence suggests that the climate was not significantly different when Iceland was settled,⁸ perhaps about one degree C warmer when the first settlers arrived,⁹ with a cooling trend throughout the saga age.¹⁰

Cool, dry polar air from the north and warm, moist air from the south frequently collide over Iceland to create unstable weather. Mean annual precipitation varies between 20 and 60 inches (500 and 1500 millimeters) in most places, reaching as high as 160 inches (4000 millimeters) on the slopes of some of the mountains.

Other features of the island were similarly favorable for settlement. Extensive meadowlands provided grazing for livestock. Bogs, heaths, and marshes promised bog iron for making tools and weapons. Underground volcanic activity created hot springs and pools, a welcome source of hot water for bathing, washing, and heating foods.

The early explorers and settlers also found abundant plant and animal life. There were forests of birch (*Betula*), willow (*Salix*), and rowan (*Sorbus*), and it is possible that coniferous species grew as well. Most trees were less than 13 feet (4 meters) high, but in isolated, sheltered spots, taller growth was possible. There was little variation in species due to the isolation of the island from other lands. Abundant driftwood along the shore partially made up for the lack of large trees in the forests.

Birdlife was extensive and varied. The coastal cliffs were densely populated with sea birds such as puffins (*Fratercula*). Large birds, such as the Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*) lived along the shore. Swans (*Cygnus*) and other waterfowl lived on the lakes and fjords. Game birds, such as ptarmigans (*Lagopus muta*), lived in mountains, heaths, and tundra. Migratory birds, like the arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), nested in Iceland before returning south to Antarctic regions for the winter. The presence of all this bird life promised food for the gathering, from both the birds and their eggs.

Offshore, fishing banks were abundant. Whales, walruses, and seals were found along the coast and in some of the fjords. Inland, the lakes and streams teemed with fish, including salmon and trout (*Salmonidae*). The only native land mammals in Iceland were arctic foxes (*Alopex lagopus*). The lack of predators would prove a significant benefit for a culture that relied heavily on its livestock.

It is possible that before Norwegian explorers and settlers arrived in the 9th century, the island was known to and visited by Europeans. Three 3rd century Roman coins found in southeastern Iceland may have been left there by sailors blown off course from Britain.¹¹ More remarkable is the 2nd century Roman clay cup found at Viðey in Iceland.¹² In the 8th century, the Venerable Bede, a monk and scholar in Northumbria, wrote of a land north of Britain called Thule, six days away by sail.¹³ It's not known if he was writing of Iceland, or some other northern land.

Icelandic literary sources say that when the first explorers visited Iceland, they found *papar*, Christians thought to be from Ireland, because Irish books, bells, and crosiers were found after they fled.¹⁴ Other contemporary sources suggest that Irish hermits sailed the North Atlantic and reached the Orkney and Faroe Islands. It is quite possible that they continued westward to Iceland, sailing in their *curachs*, skin boats with twig frames.

If the Irish hermits were present when Norwegians started exploring Iceland, it would not be surprising that they would want to flee, leaving behind valuables such as books. Irish Christians were probably all too familiar with the raiding practices of sailors from the northern seas.

It's also possible that Scandinavians may have started settling in Iceland before the voyages recorded in the Icelandic literary sources.

To date, the archaeology does not support any of these pre-settlement activities. Despite the presence of many place name references to the *papar* in Iceland that further suggest their presence, no signs of the *papar* in Iceland have been found to date. Some archaeologists express doubts about their presence.¹⁵

While early artifacts have been found in Iceland, such as the Roman coins, and early 9th century beads and brooches,¹⁶ nothing indicates that they were lost or buried any earlier than the late 9th century.

To many of the arriving settlers, the land must have looked very familiar and comfortable, similar to their homelands in Norway. The extensive forests might have been troubling to an arriving settler, since they required clearing before farming could begin. However, land could be and was cleared by the simple expedient of burning the woodlands.

In spite of Iceland's rough terrain, northerly latitude, and remoteness, this uninhabited island with extensive pasturage for the taking was an irresistible draw for Viking-age Norwegians, at a time when many Scandinavians were looking overseas to support themselves by plunder, trade, or conquest.

CHAPTER 2

The Settlement

Two separate stories of the settlement of Iceland are told by the sources. The version accepted for centuries has been the story told in the Icelandic literary sources: *Landnámabók*, *Íslendingabók*, and the *Íslendingasögur*. A different story may be found in the archaeological records, but at present, that other story is ill-defined and incomplete. Both stories are worth telling, even though they paint different pictures of the settlement and of the early settlers.

Settlers

The literary sources say that the settlement of Iceland began in earnest around the year 870. A Norwegian named Ingólfr Arnarson and his foster brother Leifr Hróðmarsson had killed the son of an earl, and they were forced to give the earl everything they possessed in compensation. Now needing to seek a new life, they prepared a ship and set out to find the land Flóki had discovered. They spent a winter in east Iceland at Álptafjörðr and returned to Norway in the spring. Ingólfr and Leifr, who had changed his name to Hjörleifr, decided to return to Iceland and settle.¹

Landnámabók tells of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr's arrival in Iceland. Like others who would follow him to Iceland, Ingólfr brought not only the practical tools and supplies and livestock of a settler, but also ceremonial items that would help define his new home. Most important among these were the high-seat pillars (*öndvegissúlur*), decorated with symbols from pagan Norse mythology, that would flank Ingólfr's seat as the head of his household. When Ingólfr sighted land, he threw the pillars overboard, saying he would settle wherever the pillars washed ashore, implicitly asking the Norse gods for guidance in his venture.²

Ingólfr asked the gods to guide the pillars to a favorable place to settle, a site that met with the approval of the protective land spirits (*landvættir*) who inhabited the land. Extraordinary measures were taken to propitiate these spirits who could alter the prosperity of the land and cause harm to farmers and livestock.³

Hjörleifr, who did not worship or sacrifice to the gods, took no such precautions. He landed at Hjörleifshöfði, built two houses, and began to farm. His slaves revolted and killed Hjörleifr and everyone else on the farm. When Ingólfr later heard the news, he commented that it was a sad end for a warrior, but it's what always happens to someone who doesn't worship.⁴

After Ingólfr threw his pillars overboard, he lost sight of them. When he made landfall, he sent his slaves to look for them. The search took three years. Ingólfr duly relocated to where the pillars had washed ashore. Ingólfr's slave didn't think much of the spot, saying, "It's not much use our traveling across good country, just so we can live on this remote headland."⁵ The pillars had landed at the present location of Reykjavík. About one thousand years later, the site of Ingólfr's homestead would become Iceland's capital city.

Landnámabók says that Ingólfr arrived in the year 874. The date is supported by the science of tephrochronology, which shows that one of the walls recently excavated below the streets of Reykjavík slightly predates the Settlement Layer, suggesting the date in *Landnámabók* is not off by more than a year or two.⁶

Ingólfr was followed by thousands of his countrymen over the subsequent decades. Medieval Icelandic writings suggest that the settlement of Iceland was



Early settlers could claim as much land as they felt they could hold, and they claimed the best land for themselves. Later settlers, like Önundr tré-fótr (wooden leg) had to make do with lesser land. Önundr took land here, under Kaldbakr (cold-back mountain). The verse he spoke made clear his unease at being forced into such a harsh bargain, giving up his fertile fields in Norway for this cold-backed mountain (author photograph).

led by wealthy and influential men and women who left Norway because of the increasing political ambitions of King Haraldr inn hárfagri (the fair-haired), who had resolved to unify Norway under his rule. This version of events is doubtless oversimplified, but it can hardly be a coincidence that the settlement of Iceland happened at the same time as Haraldr's unification of Norway.⁷

When Haraldr came to his throne around the year 860 at the age of ten, Norway was divided among chieftains, earls, and petty kings, of which Haraldr was only one. Haraldr vowed that he would not cut or comb his hair until he unified the land under his rule.⁸

Through battles with other petty kings, and alliances with powerful earls, Haraldr largely achieved his goal. He consolidated his rule at the battle of Hafsfjörðr, defeating a coalition of kings and earls. The date of the battle is contentious and was probably in the early 870s,⁹ although it may have been later. Despite the victory, Haraldr's rule over Norway was probably never solid, and large portions of the north and east were never firmly in his control.¹⁰

Haraldr's tyranny over the leading men of the land was probably overstated in the Icelandic literature. Snorri Sturluson, writing in the 13th century, said that when Haraldr came to power, all lands and possessions (*óðal*) reverted to him. Haraldr appointed an earl for each district to administer the law and collect taxes.¹¹

When Haraldr took away *óðal*, he took away the right of free farmers to own their land, effectively turning them into the king's tenants. The importance of *óðal* should not be underestimated. It was the quality that separated a free man from a slave. It was considered inalienable.

Little is known of the details of Haraldr's rule, but it is likely that the king kept bands of his warriors permanently stationed throughout the land, expecting the local farmers to provide for the troops. This sort of repressive measure would have contributed to the farmers' feeling that they no longer were masters of their own land.¹²

Some historians believe it unlikely that the king would violate these rights, except against his enemies. Perhaps the later saga authors took some liberties with their material and expressed Haraldr's encroachment on the rights of his subjects by calling it a loss of *óðal*.¹³

On the other hand, the histories and sagas suggest that many of the people who subsequently emigrated had become the king's enemies, by opposing his attempts to consolidate his rule. One might expect that the king would revoke *óðal* rights for these people, as is described in the stories.

Even if Haraldr's power is overstated in Icelandic sources, there is reason to believe that the settlement of Iceland was led by families who were wealthy, powerful, and independently minded: people who might well resent Haraldr's efforts to concentrate authority in his own hands. Wealth was required in order to outfit a settlement expedition. Power was needed to bring enough followers to make a homestead claim viable. And independence of mind was essential to

give up the familiar amenities of home for an uncertain future on a remote island.

The leading figures in the settlement do not appear to have been drawn from the Norwegian aristocracy, who perhaps had too much to lose, even if their power was being curtailed by King Haraldr's ambitions. There are no references in the Icelandic histories to aristocrats being among the settlers.

Most of the immigrants came from Norway and from Norwegian settlements in the British Isles, particularly among those who opposed Haraldr's ambitions. Histories and sagas tell of families who left Norway to live in the Orkney Islands or the Hebrides, and who raided in Norway during the summer to harry Haraldr and his supporters.¹⁴ As favorable reports were received from Iceland, many of these families left for the new land.

This is not to say that every immigrant was a wealthy Norwegian, nor that every one opposed the king. Some emigrants may have left Norway because they had few prospects there or owned little land, and thought better luck might await them in Iceland, where abundant land was free for the taking. In addition, slaves and tenants traveled with their households on the voyages to Iceland.

DNA analysis confirms that many of the settlers had Scandinavian roots. Mitochondrial-DNA evidence, however, suggests that many of the women had Celtic origins.¹⁵ About 62 percent of the Icelanders' female ancestry derives from the British Isles, with the remainder from Norway and other Nordic countries, while more than 80 percent of the male Icelandic ancestry derives from Nordic lands.¹⁶

This discrepancy is explained in the literary sources, which suggest that men married into local families during their stopovers in the Hebrides and Ireland. For example, Eyvindr Bjarnarson harried in Ireland and eventually settled there, marrying Rafarta Kjarvalsdóttir, the daughter of the king of Ireland. Their son, Helgi enn magri (the lean), was one of the first settlers in Iceland.¹⁷

Additionally, while overseas, some Icelanders purchased concubines, often from Celtic lands, and returned home with them. While in Norway, Höskuldr Kollsson bought a slave girl and brought her home to Iceland. It wasn't until she bore his child, Óláfr pái (peacock), that Höskuldr learned that she was Melkorka, the daughter of the Irish king Mýrkjartan.¹⁸ Óláfr grew up to become a wealthy and powerful man in Iceland.

The settlers arrived on ships optimized for carrying cargo, called *knörr*, described in more detail in a later chapter. Viking-age ships had no shelter below decks, so everyone and everything was subject to the full force of the North Atlantic weather. The voyage from Norway to Iceland was expected to take a week,¹⁹ but some voyages took much longer. According to the *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, the voyage of Gísli's father Þorbjörn súrr took sixty days.²⁰

When emigrants set sail for Iceland, they had to bring everything they would need to be self-sufficient in the new land. They brought their own fam-

ilies, their supporters and their families, and all the moveable wealth they could bring: precious metals, tools, household goods, livestock, and slaves.

The story of the settlers can be seen in microcosm through the family of Ketill flatnefr (flatnose), who emigrated to Iceland around the year 886.²¹ The narrative of their move is told in *Landnámabók*,²² *Laxdæla saga*,²³ and *Eyrbyggja saga*.²⁴ Each version is slightly different, but they all follow the same general outline.

Ketill was a *hersir* (chieftain) in Norway. He felt that soon, as had happened with other prominent men, the king's attention would turn towards him, and that he was likely to lose his land and rank unless he became a vassal of the king. Ketill met with his family to discuss the situation.

His son Björn said he did not want to stay in Norway to become a slave to the king. He suggested leaving for Iceland, because he had heard there was good land for the taking and excellent fishing. His father's response still delights with its humor: "I do not plan to spend my old age in those fishing grounds."²⁵

Because he was familiar with the Hebrides from having raided there in the past, Ketill emigrated there, where he became a chieftain. When King Haraldr confiscated Ketill's estates in Norway, Björn tried to claim them. The king declared Björn to be an outlaw and sent men to kill him. Björn eventually sailed to Iceland and claimed land in the west.

Ketill's daughter, Auðr, accompanied her father to the Hebrides, where she married a local chieftain. Later, when her father, son, and husband had died, she felt she no longer had any prospects in the Hebrides. She decided to join her brothers in Iceland.

In executing her plans, she took over the role of head of the household, an unusual but not unprecedented role for a woman in the saga age. She had a ship built and loaded it with goods and a retinue of supporters. She sailed away, stopping at both the Orkney and Faroe Islands, where she married off her granddaughters. She sailed to Iceland, claiming a large tract of land in west Iceland where her high-seat pillars had washed ashore. She had a farm built on the site and gave away land to her crew and her supporters. She freed her slaves and gave them land as well. While in the Hebrides, she had converted to Christianity, so rather than building a pagan temple, she erected crosses on a hill-top near her farm and said her prayers there.

Landholdings

Settlers like Ketill's family claimed land by exploring it, naming key features, and building their homes. The land claim was identified using natural geographic features, including mountains, rivers, and watersheds. Some of the first settlers claimed enormous tracts of land, such as Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson. He claimed the entire Mýrar district from the ocean to the mountains,²⁶ over 770 square miles (2000 square kilometers).

Later settlers thought these land claims were excessive. King Haraldr decreed that land claims were to be limited to the amount of land over which signal fires could be built and maintained by the settler and his crew as they walked the land claim during one period of daylight.²⁷ Haraldr's decree is interesting in that it shows that, despite the fact that many settlers were fleeing Haraldr's rule, they felt he still had some authority over the new land.

The sagas say that even some of the earliest settlers claimed their land by carrying fire. Around the year 884, Þórólfr Mostrarskegg claimed the land called Þórsnes in west Iceland and carried fire around the land claim.²⁸

Perhaps the fire not only served to claim the land, but to hallow it as well. Helgi enn magri built fires in every estuary to hallow his land claim in north Iceland.²⁹

Haukdæla þáttr says that during the early days of Iceland's settlement, Ketilbjörn enn gamli (the old) and his men came upon a frozen river. They cut a hole in the ice and dropped in an axe to claim the land, and so they called it *Øxará* (Axe River).³⁰

It is thought that the main period of settlement was between the years 890 and 910.³¹ *Íslendingabók* says that after sixty years (around the year 930), the land was fully settled, and no further settlement occurred.³² Yet, settlers continued to arrive after the year 930. Those who missed the first claims acquired land from prior settlers.

When Þorbjörn súrr (sour-milk) sailed into Dýrafjörðr from Norway with his family in the year 952,³³ the land was fully settled, according to the sagas. *Landnámabók* says that Vésteinn Végeirsson gave him half of the valley Haukadálr,³⁴ while *Gísla saga Súrssonar* says that Þorbjörn bought the land in Haukadálr.³⁵

While Haukadálr was highly desirable land, later arrivals had to make do with lesser quality land. According to *Grettis saga*, when Önundr tré-fótr (wooden-leg) arrived in Iceland, he was told that little unsettled land was still left. Eiríkr snara (snare) granted Önundr land at Kaldbaksvík, under Kaldbakr (cold-backed mountain) and at several adjacent fjords. Looking up at the mountain, Önundr spoke a verse:

Life goes to wrack —
as the seafaring ocean-steed sails —
in wealth and power,
for this spear-whetting warrior:
my lands and kinsmen
have I left behind; and to top it all,
it's a tough bargain, if I have given up
my fields, and gained only the cold-backed mountain.³⁶

Through gift or sale, early settlers distributed their land, granting portions of their claims to their crews, supporters, and family members. In this manner, the original settler built up a band of supporters and gained authority as

a chieftain in his district. The chieftain, called a *goði*, would become the key figure in the emerging system of government.

Egils saga describes how Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson gave his land to many of his men all throughout his land holdings. He established farms and set his men to running them, generating wealth to support his estates. When other relatives arrived from Norway in later years, Skalla-Grímr gave them established farms on his land holdings. To his father-in-law Yngvarr, Skalla-Grímr gave the farm Álptanes.³⁷

So many people left Norway that King Haraldr forbade emigration, for fear the land would become depopulated.³⁸ Eventually, an agreement was reached by which emigrants paid the king a tax in order to obtain permission to leave.

Archaeological Sources

In recent years, a different story of the settlement has been told based on archaeological evidence. Patterns of land settlement and farm boundaries from the saga age suggest carefully planned and executed settlements.

The patterns suggest that the very first settlers created core settlements at sites where it was easy to get a toe-hold and to establish a working farm that would support the settlers during their first years in Iceland. Places with wet, open meadowlands near the coast were chosen. The wet areas produced high quality grasses to feed the livestock over the winter,³⁹ and open spaces didn't have forest that required clearing. In addition, the first settlers looked for places with resources that could be readily exploited: bird colonies, seal and walrus rookeries, fishing grounds, and nearby islands where the small herds of livestock they were able to bring with them could safely graze and multiply.

Once the core settlement was established, many additional farms were created, filling an entire region, such as a valley. Each farm seems to have similar resources, and none seem to have had substantially more than the others, suggesting that they were planned.⁴⁰ Some of these sites are uniformly spaced on both sides of a river valley, such as in Öxnardalr in north Iceland.⁴¹

These later sites were almost certainly forested, so the land had to be cleared, probably by burning down the forest. Many settlement era farms lie directly on top of a charcoal layer.⁴² After the land was cleared, meadowlands and grain fields had to be established, all of which took time: a commodity in short supply to the very first settlers who needed food, shelter, and fodder for their livestock from the moment they stepped off their ships on Iceland's shore.

This kind of land clearing activity is supported in the literary sources. A wealthy settler, Blund-Ketill Geirsson, had many clearings made in the forest and established farms there.⁴³

Literary evidence gives no indication that the leading figures in the settle-

ment came from the Norwegian aristocratic classes. Archaeological evidence also suggests that the leaders of the settlement were not noblemen: settlement period houses are smaller and the grave goods more limited than comparable items from the Norwegian noble class of the period.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, in many cases the pattern of settlements suggests that thought and planning went into locating the settlements, to ensure that individual farms had equal access to resources.⁴⁵ Clearly some sort of leadership, exerting authority over groups of settlers, and possessing significant resources, was at work to plan and execute the settlement. It's even been suggested that the leadership might have stayed in the Scandinavian homelands and directed the enterprise from overseas.⁴⁶

CHAPTER 3

Government and Law

From the earliest stages of settlement, the Icelanders recognized a need for some form of government. Local leadership was provided by the chieftains (*goðar*), but as the habitable regions filled up, there was a need for regional and national organization as well. Yet the *goðar* were not interested in recreating the strong central authority from which they fled in leaving Norway. Nor did they need a centralized power to defend the island from outside attack. The expanse of the North Atlantic Ocean between them and their nearest neighbors was sufficient protection.¹ In the end, the Icelanders crafted a government out of their existing cultural resources, but the outcome resembled nothing in other Scandinavian lands or in the rest of Europe.

When the early settlers arrived in Iceland, they brought with them a Norwegian tradition of laws and regular district-wide legal assemblies (*þing*). In Iceland, they continued that tradition, with the *goðar* serving as leaders in these assemblies.

The settlers expected that, as had been the case in Norway, they would be free, independent men with privileges that included some basic rights: to speak their mind freely, to carry and use weapons, to meet in assemblies in order to resolve disputes, and to go about their private business without interference. The desire for equality, freedom, and justice was strong, and the leading settlers had the initiative to put into place mechanisms to maintain those freedoms.

The early settlers arriving in Iceland probably expected to be somewhat isolated on their new island home, but overland travel turned out to be easier than anticipated. Routes were found through the desolate interior of Iceland, and horse trails were established throughout the land. While difficult and dangerous, these paths created the means for Icelanders to travel on horseback in order to communicate and interact with each other to a degree that was atypical for other lands in the Viking age. This national communication highlighted the need for a national set of laws and a national assembly where disputes could be settled.

As the island's population grew, the need for some form of integration became pressing. The process was led by the regional assembly at Kjalar-



Icelanders established *Alþing*, the national assembly, which met in June at Þingvellir. The site brims with arresting natural beauty, but it was also an eminently practical site. It was easy to reach from the most densely settled parts of Iceland, and it had many natural resources required for the hundreds or thousands of *Alþing* attendees. The *Øxará* river, visible in the foreground, flows across the valley floor, and *Lögberg*, the focal point of the assembly, is the rocky outcrop marked with a flagpole in the distance (author photograph).

nessþing. This assembly had been established by Þorsteinn Ingólfsson, son of the first settler, and had been operating for many years before settlement began in earnest in other parts of the country.²

The leaders of the *Kjalarnessþing* started by reviewing existing law, sending a man named *Úlfjótr* to Norway to study the laws there. *Úlfjótr* was neither a chieftain nor a man of authority, but he was recognized as an elder and as a knowledgeable lawmaker. He spent three years in Norway and brought back with him *Úlfjótr's Law* (*Úlfjótslög*), which would form the basis for the national assembly. Portions of his law code are preserved in *Landnámabók*.³

Úlfjótr's foster-brother, *Grímr*, traveled across Iceland, to search for a suitable site for the national assembly, and perhaps to gather support from other chieftains.⁴ A site was selected, and the first *Alþing* assembly was convened around the year 930.

The place they chose is called *Þingvellir* (Assembly Plains), an eminently practical location, as well as a site of arresting natural beauty amidst a land rich in dramatic landscapes. The site was on the edge of *Ingólftr's* original land claim and had just been confiscated in a murder case. The land became public property and was set aside for the use of *Alþing*.⁵



The ravine *Hestagjá* at Þingvellir provided a natural corral for the horses of the people attending the Alþing. The only entrance to the long ravine is a narrow defile at one end of the gorge, which made it easy to control the horses' movements. The lake Þingvallavatn, immediately adjacent to the site, provided all the fish needed to feed the many Alþing participants during the two weeks that the assembly was in session. As a result, attendees were freed of the necessity of bringing food with them when they came to Þingvellir (author photograph).

Þingvellir was easy to reach from the most densely populated parts of Iceland in the south and west. There was ample space on the plains to accommodate the many hundreds or even thousands of people who attended the two week session. Food was readily available from the fish in the adjacent lake, and the Øxará river flowing across the floor of the valley provided running water for bathing and cooking. The course of the river has changed a number of times due to geological forces, and it may have been intentionally altered for the convenience of the participants at the Alþing.⁶ Firewood was available from the nearby forest Bláskógar, and there was extensive grazing and a natural corral for horses. A nearby farm brewed the ale needed for the assembly.

With the convening of the first Alþing, the Icelanders embarked on a grand experiment in national government. The experiment was a remarkable success, surviving with minor modifications throughout the saga age and into the second half of the 13th century when political pressures brought an end to Icelandic independence. The land then came under the rule of King Hákon of Norway.

For these three centuries, Iceland governed itself as an independent repub-

lic. This period is called *þjóðveldi*, the *commonwealth* or *free state* period. During this time the country was ruled by a system of laws that facilitated consensus and resolved disputes through negotiation and compromise, or in some circumstances, through sanctioned forms of private violence.⁷

Medieval Icelanders' admiration for their own legal system is feelingly evoked by several notable characters in the sagas. In *Íslendingabók*, Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði warns, "If we tear apart the law, we tear apart the peace";⁸ in the words of the central character of *Njáls saga*, "With law our land shall flourish, but it will perish with lawlessness."⁹

More is known about laws and legal procedures in Iceland than in other Viking lands because more written materials survive from Iceland. Icelandic law books such as *Grágás* were written shortly after the close of the saga age, but many of the laws and legal traditions they describe date from the early commonwealth period. Medieval Icelandic histories, such as *Íslendingabók*, describe some of the law reforms. The *Sagas of Icelanders* are also a useful source since many of them heavily involve laws and legal procedures as central parts of their plots.

The Icelanders modified their laws somewhat over the course of the saga age to meet their changing needs. Notably, there was a reform around the year 965 that divided Iceland into quarters, added more chieftaincies, and modified the court system. Another reform occurred around the year 1005 which added an appeals court. The discussion here will focus on the laws as they existed when many of the sagas took place, at the end of the 10th century and beginning of the 11th.

Iceland was divided into four administrative regions, called quarters (*ffjórðungar*). In each quarter were nine chieftains, called *goði* (plural *goðar*), and in the middle of the 10th century, three more *goðar* were added to the North Quarter. The office of the *goði* was called the *goðorð*.

The *goðar* met in regional þing in the spring, called *várþing*. Each *várþing* was presided over by the three *goðar* for the region. All the *goðar*'s supporters (called *þingmenn*) were required to attend. At these regional þing meetings, regional disputes were tried and settled.¹⁰

The *goðorð* did not have fixed physical borders. A free man could chose to support any *goði* from his district, and he could change support from one *goði* to another with only minor formalities. The allegiance was a two-way street. The *goði* looked after the interests of his *þingmenn*, and the *þingmenn* provided armed support in feuds and other disputes.

The national assembly was the Alþing, which met every year for two weeks in June. All thirty-nine *goðar* were required to attend, each accompanied by at least two advisors. Any free man could choose to attend. Each *goði* required one out of every nine of his *þingmenn* to accompany him to the Alþing. *Þingmenn* who did not attend were required to pay a tax to the *goði*, helping offset travel expenses for those who did attend.¹¹

In order to be legally fit to attend the þing, a man had to be “able to ride a full-day’s journey, and bring in his own hobbled horse after baiting, and find his way by himself where the route is known to him.”¹²

The goði was expected to argue the cases of men from his region at the Alþing. In return, the goði called upon his men for their armed support in disputes with other goðar. A goði who was involved in a feud or contentious litigation often brought much larger followings in order to back up his discussions with force, if needed. In *Hænsa-Póris saga*, it is said that Tungu-Oddr rode to Alþing with 300 men.¹³

The Alþing provided a place for men from all over the country to meet, discuss issues, and settle grievances. Three legal functions were performed at the Alþing. The laws were recited by the law speaker. The laws were reviewed and modified by the law council. Cases were judged by the quarter courts. All business was conducted out of doors, and all attendees were free to witness the proceedings.

The law council (*lögretta*), consisting of the goðar and their advisors, chose a law-speaker (*lögsögumaðr*) who was responsible for preserving and clarifying the legal tradition. In the years before a written culture developed in Iceland, the law-speaker literally spoke the law, reciting out loud one-third of the laws at each annual meeting of the Alþing. Over the course of his three-year term, the law-speaker recited the entire law code. The law code contained oaths and other formulae composed with rhythmic elements and alliterative patterns, making the laws easier to remember. The law-speaker could be called upon to clarify points of law at any time during the Alþing session.¹⁴ The law-speaker was the only official who received a regular payment for his governmental service.¹⁵

The focal point of Þingvellir was a small hill with grassy slopes and a rock outcropping called *Lögberg* (Law Rock). From *Lögberg*, the law-speaker recited the laws. He was in charge of all the activities taking place at *Lögberg*.¹⁶ Public speeches and announcements were made here, where the surrounding cliffs served as a natural amphitheater, making the speech audible to all. Each goði or one of his advisors was required to attend the recitation of the laws. Other interested parties could also attend and participate in the ensuing discussion.¹⁷ The law speaker could exert influence, but did not “rule” the country. The power remained in the hands of the goðar.

The law-council (*Lögretta*) was the legislative body of the Alþing. The voting members were the goðar. They reviewed and amended existing laws, made new laws, and granted exemptions from the law. They also had the power to make treaties in the few cases that Iceland had dealings with foreign lands.¹⁸

The exact locations of *Lögberg*, the meeting site of the *Lögretta*, and other historic sites within Þingvellir are not well known and are the subject of dispute. Þingvellir is a geologically active rift valley. As a result, the land has shifted since the Alþing was formed, and the land today looks different than it did one

thousand years ago. The subsidence of the valley floor has caused the river to flood more of the valley than it did when Alþing was founded, hiding some of the important sites. Additionally, some of the historical sites were moved after the end of the saga age, and the original sites were poorly documented.

The law-book *Grágás* states only that the law council meets where they have long met.¹⁹ A probable site is east of the Lögberg in a region now flooded by the river. The text says that there are three rows of benches around the Law Council meeting place.²⁰ Based on that description in *Grágás*, it's been suggested that the council sat on three concentric rings of wooden benches, with the goðar in the middle row, each with one advisor sitting in front and one behind.

The four Quarter Courts (*ffórðungsdómur*) tried cases against individuals. Each Quarter Court was apparently comprised of thirty-six judges, each appointed by one of the goðar. *Grágás* says that in order to qualify as a judge, a man must be free, with a settled home, capable of taking responsibility for what he says, and older than twelve years old.²¹ The courts served as a court of appeal from the regional courts, and as a court of the first instance for cases involving parties that spanned multiple quarters.²²

The decisions of the judges needed to be near-unanimous, causing frequent deadlocks. If six or more out of the thirty-six judges disagreed, then the case was deadlocked and was dismissed. This problem was addressed around the year 1005 by adding a Fifth Court, an appeals court in which decisions were made by a simple majority.²³

The courts were very different from modern western courts of law. There were no public prosecutors; all cases were private suits. Usually, cases were prosecuted by someone connected to the injured party, such as a family member or the injured party's goði. However, an individual could bring action in a case even if he were not personally involved. A man might undertake a case of this type because he stood to gain wealth and fame through a successful prosecution. If no one wanted to take a case, the matter went unprosecuted.

The regulations governing the court were complicated and were aimed at ensuring in every possible way that there could be no doubt about the justice of the outcome. Judges, witnesses and litigants all took solemn oaths. *Landnámabók* quotes the oath that was used in Iceland before Christianity was adopted. It was sworn on a silver ring reddened with the blood of a sacrificial bull. The oath was sworn to Freyr, Njörðr, and the almighty god.²⁴ Whether the last reference is to Óðinn or to Þórr is not known.

It's possible that the swearing of these oaths precluded Christians from participating in court cases until Iceland adopted Christianity in the year 1000. A Christian would be disinclined to swear an oath on a blood-reddened ring, which was required in order to participate in court cases. However, few people were probably effected. *Landnámabók* says that from the time that the Alþing was established until Christianity was adopted, Iceland was completely heathen.²⁵

Witnesses could testify only to what they saw and heard themselves.²⁶ Witnesses swore oaths not only about the activities surrounding the original offense, but also about legal procedures that had been followed as the case progressed. Thus, for example, summons witnesses swore that a person was correctly summoned to the court.

The judges heard the evidence and reached a verdict. Cases were not necessarily decided on testimony; correct legal procedure was also essential. If one side followed correct procedure and the other did not, the first side won the case, regardless of the facts.²⁷ The final portion of *Brennu-Njáls saga* is a virtual trial transcript, replete with claims and counter-claims of incorrect procedures in court.²⁸ In addition, external force could be brought to bear to influence the court's decision. The sagas tell of bribes, of threats of violence, and of actual violence in court.

Numerous legal texts survive from medieval Iceland, of which the most important is *Grágás* (Grey Goose), compiled over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries. Many sections certainly reflect practices from the saga age. Portions of it may date from the first efforts to write down the law in the winter of 1117–1118. *Grágás* is thought to represent the law as it was recited by the lawspeaker of that era.²⁹ While some of the law reflects changes and additions from after the saga age, many of the laws in *Grágás* were probably in place during the saga age.³⁰ The following instructions for a man presenting a legal case are typical of the complex procedures found in both the law books and the sagas:

He is to swear an oath that it is his case he is presenting, and state whom he has summoned, and for what he has summoned him, and the penalty he stipulated, and state to which assembly he summoned him, and that he summoned with a legal summons.... Then one of the witnesses is to utter the testimony, and use all the words in testifying that the prosecutor used in summoning the defendant. And the other witnesses are to give their assent to his testifying, but it is lawful for them to do their testifying more quickly.... If a man presents his case without swearing an oath to it, it is as if he had not presented the case, and he is to swear an oath and present the case a second time ... but it must not happen to him more than once.³¹

The courts were only one of several ways that disputes could be settled. Arbitration was a less formal process, in which both parties agreed to let a neutral third party arbitrator (*sáttarmaðr*) investigate and decide the case.³² Alternatively, one party in a dispute might offer self-judgment (*sjálfðæmi*), allowing the other side to decide the terms of the settlement. This approach was used when the first party was so weak that he was in no position to negotiate terms, or when the first party felt that the second party would act with moderation.

Njáll Þorgeirsson and Gunnarr Hámundarson offered the other self-judgment two times each, as a result of the escalating series of tit-for-tat killings arranged by their wives. The two men did not want their wives' arguments to

come between their friendship, and each knew the other would act with moderation.³³

Last, the parties might resort to bloodshed, either in formal duels, or in blood feuds, described in more detail in a later chapter.³⁴

The Icelandic system of government operated through legislative and judicial functions, expressed through the Law Council and the Quarter Courts, respectively. However, there was no executive. Once a court had decided that a party was guilty, the þing had no power to execute a sentence. Enforcement was up to the injured party, his family, or his supporters.

Frequently, the sentence was financial compensation, to be paid by the guilty party to the injured party. The law provided for standard amounts of compensation, depending on the injury and the status of the parties involved.

A common sentence was outlawry. A person sentenced to outlawry was literally placed outside the protection of the law; laws no longer applied to an outlaw. Outlawry had two forms.

Someone subject to full outlawry (*skóggangr*) was effectively banished from society. Since he was no longer protected by law, his property was stripped from him. He could not be fed or sheltered or assisted. Whether at home or abroad, he could be killed without penalty by anyone,³⁵ and the sagas suggest that many might try to effect a killing for the honor that resulted from slaying an outlaw.

The sentence of full outlawry was effectively a death sentence. Of the outlaws mentioned in the sagas, Grettir Ásmundarson lived the longest as an outlaw, depending on his wits and his strength to survive. Some versions of the saga say he lived nineteen years as an outlaw, although the chronology of the saga suggests only fifteen years.³⁶

In lesser outlawry (*fjörbaugsgarðr*), the guilty party was banished for only three years. He was immune from attack while abroad.³⁷ His property was not confiscated, making it possible for him to return to a normal life after three years.³⁸

The magnitude of the punishment of outlawry should not be underestimated. Not only was there the psychological terror of loneliness due to exclusion from all social contacts, there was also the very real threat of violence and death from unrelated third parties who sought to increase their own prestige by killing an outlaw. The outlaw sagas, such as *Gísla saga* and *Grettis saga*, emphasize the relentless alertness required of an outlaw in order to stay alive. The sagas also describe the loneliness and suffering that was the way of life for an outlaw.

Alþing was called into session on the evening of the Thursday of the tenth week of summer, which, according to the old Icelandic calendar, fell in the middle of June.³⁹ The site of the Alþing was hallowed by the *allsherjargoði* (the public goði) as part of the opening ceremonies. This official was the goði who held the goðorð originally belonging to Ingólfr Arnarson, the first settler in Iceland.

On Friday, the law-speaker went to Lögberg. Judges were appointed by the goðar, and notices of lawsuits were proclaimed.⁴⁰ On Saturday, the law-speaker conducted the goðar and their judges to the places where the courts were to meet. Judges could be challenged and disqualified for a variety of reasons, notably if they had kinship with people whose cases were to be heard.⁴¹ The goðar were then required to find a suitable replacement.

Evidence in *Grágás* suggests that court business continued through the night.⁴² In several instances, court deadlines are specified as the time when the sun comes on to Þingvellir in the morning. For example, *Grágás* says that courts should be out for challenging on Saturday and remain out until the sun comes on to Þingvellir on Sunday morning.⁴³

The law council met on Sunday and whenever the law-speaker chose to summon them.

The Alþing ended on Wednesday evening, nearly a fortnight after it opened. The law council met, and final proclamations were made from Lögberg. The meeting was closed with a *vápnatak*, the taking up of weapons.⁴⁴ In other Scandinavian countries, the *vápnatak* was a clash of weapons,⁴⁵ but in Iceland, it is thought to have been little more than a token of the ancient custom.⁴⁶

A truce was nominally observed during the þing. While the assembly was in session, weapons might be carried, but had to be secured with *friðbönd* (peace straps) to discourage violence should tempers flare during the proceedings.

Virtually any free man could choose to attend. Þingvellir is about 30 miles (50 kilometers) inland from the modern location of Reykjavík. For those living in the more heavily populated south and west districts, the trip was only a short overland journey on routes such as *Leggjabrótr* (leg-breaker) from Hvalfjörðr to Þingvellir.

Most rode on horseback to Þingvellir. For those who lived in the remote parts of the western or eastern fjords, the total time taken up by the Alþing, including travel time, might have been as long as seven weeks, a significant fraction of the short Icelandic summer.⁴⁷ Hrafnkell Freysgoði's journey from his home in east Iceland to Þingvellir took seventeen days.⁴⁸

While attending the þing, goðar and their þingmenn lived in *búðir* (booths), structures with a permanent stone foundation which was tented over with a temporary fabric roof while the þing was in session. A goði was required to provide booth space for his men.⁴⁹ There were few, if any, permanent buildings on the site.⁵⁰ Other attendees lived in tents, although some merchants may have maintained their own booths.

Booth ruins are visible today at Þingvellir and many of the regional þing sites. The visible ruins are thought to date from the modern era, and most are probably from the 18th century. Yet, the booths on Biskupshólar at Þingvellir were studied during the summers of 2002 through 2004, and some of the traces found in the deepest layers are believed to date from the 10th century.⁵¹

Sleeping and private conversations took place within the booths, but vir-

tually all other activities at Alþing took place out-of-doors: cooking, socializing, game-playing, bathing, and political discussions. June weather at Þingvellir is usually pleasant, with an average high during the day of 54°F (12°C).⁵²

The sagas portray some of the activities that took place within the booths. *Hrafnkels saga* describes the sleeping arrangements in the booth of Þorgeirr Þjóstarsson, the goði from Þorskafljörðr. Þorgeirr and his brother Þorkell slept in leather sleeping sacks (*húðfat*) across the far end of the booth.⁵³ Þorgeirr slept with his foot stretched out on the footboard of the bed because a painful boil on his toe had burst.⁵⁴

Þorkell advised Sámr Bjarnarson and his elderly uncle Þorbjörn that if they wanted Þorgeirr's help in prosecuting a case, the old man should go into the booth and stumble and fall on to the footboard, jerking the injured toe of the sleeping Þorgeirr in the process. Þorbjörn followed the advice to the letter and was able to get both Þorgeirr's attention and his help.

Chapters 119 and 120 of *Brennu-Njáls saga* tell of the attempts by Ásgrímr Elliða-Grimsson and the sons of Njáll to enlist support for their case at Alþing. Ásgrímr and seven other men went from booth to booth, asking various chieftains for their support. In most cases, the goði sat at the far end of his booth, although in the booth of the Möðruvellir people, Guðmundr inn ríki (the powerful) was sitting on a high-seat in the middle of the booth.⁵⁵ In the booth of the Ölfusingar, Skapti Þóroddsson was sitting on a cross bench.⁵⁶ The language suggests that there might have been raised wooden floors in some booths.⁵⁷ In most cases, Ásgrímr and his party were invited to sit down and discuss the case, but in the booth of Þorkell hákr (the bully), Þorkell's men were already sitting on either side of him when the eight men entered.⁵⁸

These stories suggest that booths were quite roomy, with room for many men to sit and talk. Yet the surviving booth ruins are quite small. Perhaps in the saga age, the booths were considerably larger than the 17th and 18th century ruins visible today.

In addition to the attendees who participated in politics and law, the Alþing attracted all sorts of merchants, craftsmen, and peddlers. The annual meeting was a time for marriages to be arranged, alliances to be made and broken, friendships to be renewed, and gossip and news to be exchanged. Perhaps a thousand people routinely attended the Alþing, although many more attended important or contentious sessions.⁵⁹ Men and women from every part of the country attended.

After their return home from Alþing, the participants must certainly have enjoyed sharing all the news with their family and neighbors who had stayed home. Through these connections, news about people from every district was dispersed and disseminated across the entire land. Despite the sparseness of the population, the Alþing made it possible for Icelanders to know one another and interact to a much greater degree than was typical in other European lands during the Viking age.

Social Structure and Gender

Social Structure

According to the saga sources, the period of settlement in Iceland lasted about 60 years, between the years 870 and 930, after which time, the land was fully settled and immigration effectively ended.¹

Estimates of the population at the end of settlement range from 20,000 to 70,000 people.² In the sixty years of the settlement period, Icelanders built a social structure and developed a national and regional government. By the end of the settlement period, the society of saga-age Iceland was fully in place.³

The Norse mythological poem *Rígsþula* describes the three social classes in Norse society: *jarl* (earl or lord), *karl* (farmer), and *þræll* (slave).⁴ In practice, the social situation was more complex, but the poem gives the modern reader a sense of the broad categories brought by the Icelanders from their Scandinavian homelands.

In Iceland, this traditional Scandinavian social structure was flattened. The highest echelon of settlers were no higher than petty aristocracy in Norway. While Icelanders respected the authority of foreign nobles, they had none of their own. Icelandic society reduced to two broad categories: free farmers, and those who were not free. This broad division was reflected in the law codes. The right to compensation for offenses was the same for all free men in Iceland,⁵ which was not the case in Norway.

Grave inventories in Iceland also show a more egalitarian society. There are no great mounds or ship settings or extravagant grave goods indicative of high status graves as in other Viking lands.⁶ Nonetheless, within these two broad divisions, there existed various social strata.

The highest of the free class in Iceland was the *goðar*. In principle, the *goði* was just another free farmer, but he was first among equals.⁷ He was the point of contact between his followers and the regional and national structures of government, and the first man to turn to for support in a dispute. He was the leading man and the leader of men in the district.

In addition, the *goði* served as the priest for the Norse heathen religion and was held to have a special relationship with the gods. People turned to their



The comparatively flat Viking social structure became even more flattened in Iceland, dividing into two broad groups: the free, and the un-free, which included slaves. In the sagas, slaves are often stock characters: cowardly, stupid, and foul. *Gísli saga* tells of Gísli's escape from his home in Haukadalr, chased by pursuers farther up into the valley. Gísli was aided by his slave Þórðr inn huglausi (the coward). Gísli took advantage of his slave's witlessness to make good his own escape, at the cost of the slave's life (author photograph).

goði to set up the temples and to perform the rites of Norse paganism. After the conversion to Christianity, the goðar transferred this special relationship to the new church.

The original goðar were probably the leaders of the ships carrying settlers to Iceland. They claimed the land and divided it up among their followers. The office of the goði was called a *goðorð*. While the son of a goði was first in line to take over the *goðorð*, the office was not hereditary; it had to be earned.

Since a free man could choose to support any goði from his district and change support with only minor formalities, a successful goði was constantly buying, selling, and trading influence and support with his own supporters and with other goðar. A goði who neglected to look after his þingmenn could find himself without any supporters, leaving his *goðorð* open for seizure by someone more promising.

Originally, thirty-six *goðorð* were established in Iceland, later expanded to thirty-nine. The *goðorð* could be shared among men, so there might be more than thirty-nine goðar. However, only one goði from each *goðorð* could participate in the official business at the Alþing. A woman could own a *goðorð* but was prohibited from serving as a goði; she was required to choose a male proxy.⁸

Next in prominence to the goðar were the land-owning farmers. They sup-

ported the goðar and counted on the goðar for support when needed. Some farmers were more prominent than others, thanks to their family ties with other powerful farmers, or the size and wealth of their farms, or the number of their supporters.

All free men enjoyed a degree of liberty that was unknown outside of Iceland at this time. They had a right to free speech, to participate in public affairs and government, to bear arms, and to enjoy the full benefit of the law.

During the settlement, a free man could take whatever land he desired, subject to his ability to hold on to it. As a result, initially every free man was a landowner.⁹ Land was plentiful and sparsely settled. A powerful man could claim land and enforce his claims. A less powerful man could expect to receive a land grant from his ship's captain or his goði, or to buy land.

Free men at the lower end of the social spectrum might not be able to own land. In addition, after the land was fully settled, there were more people than there was land for them to own. As a result, some free men were not landowners. Typically, these people were tenants who farmed a landholding in exchange for an annual rent to the owner. The rent was set at 10 percent of the value of the land per year.¹⁰ People in this class retained all the rights of landowners, although the owners of the land reserved a say in how their tenants ran their farms.¹¹

Below the tenants were the farmhands, who worked for a farmer in exchange for room, board, and wages. Similarly, servant-women performed the chores required of women. Non-landowning fishermen were also in this category. These people had no rights at government assemblies.¹²

Paupers and vagrants were technically free, but they were classed at the base of society, even below freed slaves. This was in part because they had no residence and thus did not fit into the legal system.

Every person was required to have a fixed abode. In order to bring a legal charge against a person, he had to be summoned to the *þing* (legal assembly) for his region. With no fixed abode, a vagrant couldn't be charged in the proper court. Since the law had no hold over vagrants, they were a danger to the smooth operation of society.

Paupers and vagrants were not allowed to marry, and in theory anyone was allowed to take a vagrant's property¹³ or even to castrate him without penalty.¹⁴ Vagrants were prohibited from begging for food at Alþing, and the law permitted them to be turned away roughly, as long as no permanent injuries were inflicted.¹⁵

Slaves were at the bottom of society. They were chattel, with minimal rights, and their only relation with the rest of society was through their owner. They could neither inherit nor bequeath goods, and they could take no part in any business transaction. Slaves could be put to death when they were no longer fit to work due to age or disease.¹⁶ In the saga literature, slaves are often stock characters: unreliable, cowardly, stupid, and foul.

Þórðr inn huglausi (the coward) from *Gísli saga* exemplifies all of these qualities. Börkr Þorsteinsson was in pursuit of Gísli Súrsson, who had loaded his valuables onto a sled pulled by two horses in an attempt to reach the safety of the woods in the higher reaches of the Haukadalr valley. With Gísli was his slave, Þórðr. Telling the slave that he wanted to reward him for his service, Gísli exchanged cloaks with Þórðr, and the two men traded places. Gísli led the horses while Þórðr sat on the sled, showing off and thinking himself finely dressed. The saga author notes that Þórðr had as much wits as courage: none.¹⁷

When Börkr caught up with the two, Þórðr fled with terror into the woods, while Gísli continued to lead the sled to safety. Börkr and his men followed the finely dressed slave into the woods and killed him, thinking he was Gísli, while Gísli made his escape.

Slaves who had been freed were nominally free men, but their status remained low. If a freed slave died without an heir, the inheritance would revert to the slave's original owner. Once tainted by slavery, no man's honor could ever be spotless. The children of freed slaves were completely free in Iceland, unlike other Viking lands, where it could take four generations to be free from the taint of slavery.

The sagas suggest that powerful and influential families could descend from a freed slave. Auðr en djúpauðga gave land to her freed man Vífill. His granddaughter Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir married Þorfinnr karlsefni.¹⁸ The two traveled to Vínland,¹⁹ and after their return to Iceland, a prosperous and prominent family descended from them.²⁰

Slaves did have at least a few rights. They could accumulate property, and with care, could save enough to buy their freedom. Slaves could marry, and were permitted to take vengeance for interference with their wives.²¹

The sagas suggest that slaves were initially plentiful in Iceland. Many were brought over by the settlers along with their other property. Others were acquired through trade or violence in the areas of Viking activity. Free men could become slaves if they were unable to pay their debts. Debtors whose payments were overdue became the property of the creditor until the debt was paid.²²

Some early settlers freed their slaves upon arriving in Iceland, setting them up on farms within their land claims. Auðr en djúpauðga gave freedom and a large tract of land to her slave Erpr Meldúnsson.²³

A large, plantation-style slave economy never existed in Viking society. Slaves generally worked alongside hired workers on family farms, although the harder and less desirable work frequently fell on the backs of the slaves. Iceland's economy was not well suited to the use of slave labor, and slavery in Iceland probably died out in the 11th century.²⁴

Men bought slaves as concubines, with the price set by law,²⁵ about the price of one milk-cow. *Laxdæla saga* tells the story of Höskuldr Kollsson, who bought the slave Melkorka Mýrkjartansdóttir in Norway and brought her back

to his home in Iceland. Her price was three times the customary price because the slave merchant valued her more highly than any of his other slaves.²⁶

Within Icelandic society, one had the ability to move up (or down) in class. A young man who returned from a successful overseas raiding or trading mission might have the wealth, fame, and ambition to purchase a better farm, or a *goðorð*, and with it, a better position in society.

Hrafnkels saga tells the story of Sámr Bjarnason, a man of modest ability and status, who overreached. By force, he took Hrafnkell's *goðorð* and his farm for himself, but he lacked the skills and talents needed to hold on to them. After years of living in a position of wealth and authority, Sámr lost them both when Hrafnkell took his authority and property back by force. Hrafnkell allowed Sámr to return alive to his original modest farm at Leikskálar, but Sámr was not happy with his lot.²⁷

Occasionally, a man who was in an untenable position in a dispute would turn over all his wealth and property to his *goði* and move into the *goði*'s household in exchange for the promise of a lifetime of support. In *Vápnfirðinga saga*, Þórðr did just that, turning over his property to Brodd-Helgi Þorgilsson rather than getting involved with an escalating feud between Brodd-Helgi and Geitir Lýtingsson.²⁸

Gender Roles

Within each of these social classes, men and women each had distinctive roles to play. In broad terms, men looked outward, to the farm and the community, while women looked inward, to the home and the family. In practical terms, the dividing line was defined by the threshold of the outer door of the house.²⁹ Women were responsible for the work inside the house, while men were responsible for the outdoor work.

The societal framework was predictably patriarchal. The legal, governmental, and domestic authority of the society rested in male hands. By law, a woman was under the authority of her husband or father. She was prohibited from participating in most political or governmental activities. She could not be a *goði*, a judge, or a witness, nor could she participate in a legal assembly.³⁰ She had only limited freedom to dispose of property belonging to her.

Yet, on the other hand, women enjoyed a level of respect and freedom in saga-age Iceland far greater than that of other European societies of that era. Women managed the family finances. In their husbands' absence, women ran the family farm. In widowhood, women could be rich and important landowners.

The law protected women from a wide range of unwanted attention ranging from kissing to intercourse.³¹ Women could declare themselves divorced through a simple verbal formula recited before witnesses. The sagas often show

women playing strong and dynamic roles. Many of the character traits regarded as positive in men, such as a sense of honor, courage, and a strong will, were also regarded as positive traits in women.

As a consequence of the legal and practical limitations imposed on them, women typically achieved their power indirectly, through their ability to influence the actions of the men around them. Women are often shown inciting men to action when the men would otherwise be content to stay home. Often, women took on this role when the family's honor was threatened.

In *Laxdæla saga*, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, the wife of Bolli Þorleiksson, incited her husband and her brothers to take revenge on Kjartan Ólafsson, Bolli's beloved foster-brother. Knowing that Bolli was repulsed at the thought of such a despicable act, Guðrún used all the manipulative eloquence she could command to put her kinsmen's manhood on the line. Pulling out all the stops, Guðrún egged the men on to action:

"With your temperament, you'd have made some farmer a good group of daughters, fit to do no one any good or any harm. After all the abuse and shame Kjartan has heaped upon you, you don't let it disturb your sleep while he goes riding by your home with only one other man to accompany him. Such men have no better memory than a pig. There's not much chance you'll ever dare to make a move against Kjartan at home if you won't even stand up to him now, when he only has one or two others with him. The lot of you just sit at home, making much of yourselves, and one could only wish there were fewer of you."³²

The episode is especially poignant because Guðrún was formerly betrothed to Kjartan, and events in the story suggest that her fury was partly fueled by disappointed love. At the end of the saga, the aged Guðrún, who had been four times widowed, was asked by her son Bolli Bollason which man she most loved. She cryptically replied, "I was worst to him I loved best."³³

A woman might use the threat of divorce as a means to goad her husband into action. Divorce was relatively easy to obtain and could result in severe financial burdens on the husband. After divorce, both the dowry (*heimanfylgja*, the wealth contributed by the bride's family to the wedding), and also the bride-price (*mundr*, the wealth contributed by the husband's family), reverted to the woman and had to be paid to her upon divorce. Both of these payments were the personal property of the wife, and a divorced man could find it extremely difficult to find the ready resources to pay them.

Gísla saga says that Þorkell Súrsson overheard his wife Ásgerðr Þorbjarnardóttir admit to marital infidelities. That night, he refused to allow her into his bed. Ásgerðr offered him a choice: either to let her into his bed, or she would divorce him on the spot, and her father would come to collect the bride-price and dowry.³⁴ Þorkell thought quietly for a moment, and then he allowed her into the bed, saying no more about the matter.

Women are shown being skilled in magic. In general, this practice was considered evil, such as the magic used by Þuríðr against Grettir Ásmundarson.

She enchanted a tree trunk that led to a self-inflicted wound to Grettir's leg. The wound festered, and Grettir was so weakened that he was unable to defend himself effectively against his nemesis, Þorbjörn öngull (hook), who killed him.³⁵

When the magic was used for good, the woman was admired. During a time of extended famine in Greenland, Þorbjörg carried out *seiðr* (magic rites) to foretell the fates of the assembled people and when the famine would end.³⁶ In so doing, she was a welcome and honored guest.

It was considered shameful in the extreme to harm a woman, and examples in the sagas of such violence are rare and are usually followed by the men of the district banding together to track down and punish the killer. It was a grave dishonor for a man to injure a woman, even accidentally, in an attack on a household. If, for instance, a house were going to be burned to kill the occupants, women and children were allowed to leave without injury. As Flosi Þórðarson and his men were burning down the house at Bergþórshváll, Flosi invited the women, children and servants to leave the burning house.³⁷

Even mild or mischievous violence against women was unacceptable. When one of Helgi Droplaugarson's men playfully threw a snowball at a woman, Helgi chastised the man, saying, "Only an idiot attacks a woman."³⁸

Each gender had a set of expected behaviors, and that line could not be crossed with impunity. Members of either sex who crossed the gender line were, at very least, ostracized by society. Some cross-gender behaviors were strictly prohibited by law. Icelandic law prohibited women from wearing men's clothes, from cutting their hair short, and from carrying weapons.³⁹

Examples of women using weapons in the sagas are rare. Typically, they did so when their husbands acted in a weak or shameful manner.

After the cowardly Eyjólfur Þórðarson had killed Gísli Súrsson, he went to visit Börkr Þorsteinsson and his wife, Þórdís Súrsdóttir, who was Gísli's sister. Börkr welcomed Eyjólfur and invited him to tell the story of his deed, but Þórdís wanted to offer only meager hospitality to her brother's killer.

After the meal had been served, Þórdís dropped a tray full of spoons. As she bent down to pick them up, she saw Gísli's sword lying at Eyjólfur's feet. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Þórdís grabbed the sword and thrust up at Eyjólfur from under the table, intending to run him through. The crossguard on the sword's hilt caught against the edge of the table, and Eyjólfur suffered only a wound to the thigh. Börkr seized Þórdís and wrenched the sword from her grasp. She declared herself divorced from Börkr on the spot.⁴⁰

An exception to this prohibition against violence to women was the mayhem that occurred during Viking raids. Women were sometimes carried off as booty to be sold as slaves. Although descriptions of this kind of activity are rare in the sagas, it's clear that it occurred. For example, Melkorka Mýrkjartansdóttir told her Icelandic owner that she was taken and enslaved when she was fifteen years old.⁴¹

Regardless of the difference in position of men and women in society, it is clear that both were needed to work a farm successfully. If either were to leave the farm, whether due to death or divorce or overseas travel, the remaining member would have to find a replacement quickly if the farm were to survive. The remaining spouse might look to family members or hired hands to fill the role, or alternatively, look for a new spouse if the absence was permanent.⁴²

In some cases, men were hermits and worked their farms single-handedly. Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson gave land to Oddr einbúi (single-dweller) to look after the salmon fishing at the river Gljúfrá.⁴³

Some men simply did not want the company of women. Helgi Droplaugarson enjoyed visiting with Helga Þorbjarnardóttir, but when she refused his further advances, he stopped visiting her. The saga says that he was never in love with any other woman, as far as is known.⁴⁴

Feuds, Honor, and the Culture of Combat

Violence and feuds

Saga-age Iceland has been characterized as having a culture of combat. It is certainly true that violence, and the threat of violence, was an accepted part of life in the Viking age. Violence was not only regarded as an appropriate means of resolving a conflict, it was prescribed by law in some cases. The Icelandic legal system served above all as a vehicle for managing conflict and violence. Saga-age Icelanders understood the need to limit that violence so that the fabric of society was not threatened and so that lives were not taken unnecessarily. In the words of *Hávamál*, a poem of ethical guidance which dates to the Viking age, “It is better to be alive ... a corpse is of no use to anyone.”¹

In saga-age Iceland, violent conflict was managed, moderated, and contained by the conventions of the feud. Blood-feuds permitted conflicts to play out and to reach a resolution without excessive killing that might strain the society’s fabric. Because Iceland had no central authority, people and families and kin-groups had to rely on their own resources to avoid being victimized by those around them. They had to provide their own deterrent force. The blood-feud was a system of social conventions that sanctioned private retribution for offenses, while limiting escalation and avoiding broader social damage.²

The feud revolved around the concept of *honor*. The English word utterly fails to express the depth and complexity of the concept in the saga age. Honor was a measure of the social credibility of an individual. Honor was earned by the person who possessed it, granted by the community around him who observed and judged his behaviors. When traveling, a man’s honor was conveyed by his reputation and good name, and by his family’s reputation.

Someone with honor was treated with respect in every interaction: social, business, government, and community. To treat an honorable man with disrespect was a grave error having harsh or even lethal consequences. A man without honor was fair game for the unscrupulous and likely to be on the losing end of every interaction.



The feud between Kjartan Ólafsson and Bolli Þorleiksson came to a head here, at Kjartanssteinn (Kjartan's stone) in the Svínadalr valley. Bolli's wife, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, incited her husband and her brothers to take revenge on Kjartan as he rode through the valley with only a few men to support him. Bolli reluctantly agreed to the plan, repulsed by the thought of such a despicable act towards his beloved foster-brother. Bolli did everything in his power to spoil the ambush, including standing up in plain sight on top of this hillock in the foreground, but Kjartan continued to ride directly into the ambush. Bolli unwillingly joined in the fray, but as he did, Kjartan stopped fighting, refusing to raise a weapon against his foster-brother. Bolli struck the death blow, and Kjartan died in Bolli's arms (author photograph).

Honor was shared amongst one's kin group. A man of honor lifted his entire extended family's reputation, while a dishonorable man shamed every branch of his family tree. To possess honor was a significant practical asset in every kind of transaction amongst Icelanders in the saga age.

Honor also figured in to the old Norse pagan religious beliefs. The after-life was not a prominent feature of these beliefs, and as a result, the only thing that survived a person's death was his good name, his reputation, and his honor. Honor, therefore, had an enduring value far beyond any mere physical possession.³

For all of these reasons, society expected a man to defend his honor against any indignity, no matter how small or how insignificant. It was better to preserve one's honor without the use of arms if possible, but it must be preserved regardless of the cost.⁴ *Hávamál* advises that one should constantly be on the alert for wrongs and make no peace with one's enemies.⁵

A family's honor was a tribute to its ancestors and a legacy for its descendants. People were expected to preserve their honor and enrich it if at all possible.⁶

Another aspect of Norse pagan beliefs that guided behavior in the saga age was *fate*. The myths tell of the Norns (*Nornar*), three supernatural women of destiny. At the moment of a child's birth, the three Norns determine the moment of his death.⁷ No man can outlive the night decreed by the Norns for his death.⁸

While the moment of death was preordained, nothing else in life was. Thus in any venture, there were two possible outcomes: success with its attendant fame; or death. Since its time was preordained, death would occur whether someone stayed home safe in bed, or fought a battle against overwhelming odds. If it wasn't your time to die, then overwhelming odds didn't matter; success, victory, and honor were yours for the taking. Thus, in the saga age, there was no reason to be retiring and every reason to be bold and adventuresome.

This outlook on life is illustrated in a story from *Sverris saga*. King Sverrir of Norway addressed his troops before a battle and related a story about a father giving advice to his young son before a battle.

A farmer accompanied his son to the warships and gave him counsel, telling him to be valiant and hardy in perils. "How would you act if you were engaged in battle and knew beforehand that you were destined to be killed?"

The son answered, "Why then should I refrain from striking right and left?"

The farmer said, "Now suppose someone could tell you for certain that you would not be killed?"

The son answered, "Why then should I refrain from pushing forward to the utmost?"

The farmer said, "In every battle you fight, one of two things will happen: you will either fall or come away alive. Be bold, therefore, for everything is preordained. Nothing can bring a man to his death if his time has not come, and nothing can save one doomed to die. To die in flight is the worst death of all."⁹

Together, the forces of fate and honor drove people in the saga age to be bold and adventuresome, seeking to find ways to accumulate honor, and hypersensitive to any attempt to diminish honor. The range of resulting behaviors ran the gamut from *drengskapr* to *níðr*. The first is usually translated as *honor*, and the second as *shame*.

A *drengr* (honorable man) was brave, honest, fearless, with a sense of fair play, and a respect for others. He always kept his word. Strength, although admired, needed to be moderated so one did not become *ójafnaðr* (unjust).¹⁰

Countless examples from the sagas show the values that were admired: valor, generosity,¹¹ restraint, moderation, sense of humor, imperturbability, refusal to indulge in emotional outbursts, stoicism, self-control,¹² and the refusal to give way in the face of insurmountable odds.¹³

Hávamál offers further guidance.¹⁴ Value wisdom and common sense. Be cheerful, mindful, and affable. Be thoughtful, and sparing of words. Be inde-

pendent even if it means owning few possessions. Be decent but not overly concerned about appearance. Have reasonable ambitions, neither too great nor too modest. Be a friend to a friend, and repay gift with gift. Value friendship most of all.

For a friend, no sacrifice is too great. For an enemy, no scruples need be observed.

A *níðingr* was the object of scorn and revulsion. He was an outcast. Other men were unlikely to support him, help him, or shelter him. Typical causes for such disgrace included: cowardice, treachery, breaking one's oath, and killing kinsmen or defenseless people. When a man betrayed the trust of another man, he became known as a *níðingr*.

In *Gísla saga*, Auðr Vésteinsdóttir struck Eyjólfur inn grái (the gray) across the face, drawing blood. Eyjólfur ordered his men to kill the woman, an act considered shameful in the extreme. Hávarður stood up to Eyjólfur, telling the men not to do *níðingsverk*, the work of a *níðingr*.¹⁵

Dishonor occurred any time an individual was perceived as suffering some injury without exacting some retribution or receiving appropriate compensation. Dishonor could be imparted through a number of means; it needn't be merely an injury due to physical attack. Other kinds of injury also caused dishonor: robbery, damage to property, inequitable sharing of resources, or even an unjust business deal. The dishonor could be incurred whether the injury was to oneself, a relative, or a subordinate.

In addition, many sorts of non-material injuries threatened honor. Some insults were considered so powerful and venomous that, by law, a man was free to kill the person who spoke them. Insults were thought to be even more powerful when expressed in verse. The penalty for composing just half a stanza of poetry with defamation or mockery in it was full outlawry.¹⁶

Most of these insults related to transgressions against gender roles. *Grágás* says that if a man calls another man womanish, or says that he has been buggered, the recipient of the insult has the right to kill in retaliation.¹⁷

In the saga-age culture, cowardice and effeminacy were two sides of the same coin. Effeminacy implied sexual and social impotence. To suggest that a saga-age Icelander was no man, such as suggesting that he was the submissive partner in an encounter, was a mortal insult.

In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Flosi Þórðarson, thinking he had been insulted by Njáll Þorgeirsson, taunted him, saying, "There are many who can't tell by looking at him whether he is a man or a woman." Njáll's son, Skarpheðinn, responded in kind: "You are the bride of the troll at Svínafell; people say he uses you as a woman every ninth night."¹⁸

Flosi later avenged the insult by burning down Njáll's house, killing Njáll, Skarpheðinn, and many others in the flames.

Physical symbols could impart dishonor. In *Gísla saga*, Kolbjörn accepted a duel with Hólmgöngu-Skeggi (the dueler) over the matter of which of the

two will marry Gísli's sister, Þórdís. Intimidated by Skeggi's reputation, Kolbjörn reneged, so Gísli took his place in the duel.

Skeggi arrived at the dueling site first and concluded that both Gísli and Kolbjörn had backed out, a shameful failure. Skeggi told a carpenter to make wooden effigies in the likeness of Gísli and Kolbjörn, one behind the other, to mock and shame them. Although not explicit, a sexual insult is clearly intended.¹⁹

The ultimate symbol of shame was the *níðstöng* (scorn-pole). *Egils saga* describes the níðstöng raised by Egill against King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr of Norway after Egill received shameful treatment from them while trying to recover his wife's inheritance. Egill placed the severed head of a horse on top of a hazel pole driven into the rocks near shore. He invoked a curse against the king and queen, demanding no rest for *landvættir* (land spirits) until they had driven the king and queen from the land. Turning the horse's head toward the mainland where the king and queen were located, Egill carved the curse in runes on the pole.²⁰

Dishonor could also be imparted with actions. A range of activities meant to disgrace or mock or diminish a man are described and prohibited in the law codes. Intentionally making someone dirty, tearing or cutting their clothing, or anything meant to cause disgrace could be punished with full outlawry.²¹

A memorable example is depicted in *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*. Þorgeirr Þórisson wished to avenge the death of his father on Skúta Áskelsson at the Alþing meeting. To get Skúta's attention, Þorgeirr arranged for Skúta's booth, his temporary residence at Alþing, to be used as a latrine all summer before the assembly convened. Skúta acknowledged the prank by killing Þorgeirr with a blow from his axe.²²

While some injuries could be settled with an appropriate monetary compensation, which was set by law, other injuries were so serious a threat to honor that a violent response was required. One legally sanctioned way of making good on verbal injuries was through a duel. The less formal form of dueling was known as *einvígi* (single combat), while the more formal duel was called a *hólm-ganga* (going to the island) because duels were frequently fought on small islands. The island prevented cowards from running away and limited possible interference from third parties.

Many duels in saga-age Iceland took place at Hólmrinn, an island in the Öxará river at Þingvellir, the site of the annual Alþing assembly. Because of the changes that have taken place in the topography of the site since the saga age, it is not possible to say with any certainty where the island was located.

The differences between the two forms of duels apparently were quite significant, as the sagas make clear. Kormákr Ögmundarson challenged Bersi Véleifsson to a hólm-ganga, a formal duel. Bersi offered, instead, an einvígi, the less formal single combat. "You are a young, inexperienced man. There is difficulty in a hólm-ganga, but none in an einvígi," Bersi said.²³

One has the sense that in an einvígi, two men met and fought to the death, with few formalities. In contrast, a hólmganga had an elaborate set of preparations and customs, and the duel could be ended honorably after first blood.

Many of the descriptions of duels in the sagas begin with a recitation of the dueling law (*hólmgöngulög*). The law seems to vary from one saga to the next in significant ways, but there are similarities. A cloak was laid on the ground, about 8 feet (2.5 meters) square.²⁴ If either man stepped off the cloak, he lost the duel and was deemed to be *níðingr*.

Some of the dueling laws seem so fantastic as to be implausible. The dueling laws recited in *Kormáks saga* say that the man who prepares the pegs that fasten the dueling cloak to the ground must approach the pegs in such a way that he can see the sky between his legs while grasping his earlobes and reciting an invocation.²⁵

Weapons used were swords, spears, and axes. Each man was allowed three shields, in the likely possibility of breakage. In many cases, a shieldbearer held the shield during the duel, although some men preferred to bear their own shields in a duel. For example, when Earl Herrøðr offered to hold Þorsteinn Þorgnýsson's shield, Þorsteinn declined, not wanting to put anyone else at risk.²⁶

If either man's blood fell on the cloak, he was permitted to withdraw from the duel. The man with the worse wound could buy himself off. However, if a man died, all his property went to the winner, so most fights were to the death.

In some cases, a sacrificial bull was brought to the dueling site and slaughtered by the winner of the duel. Egill Skalla-Grimsson dueled with Atli inn skammi (the short) and ended the duel by grappling with Atli and biting out his throat. While still in a battle frenzy, Egill picked up the sacrificial bull and twisted it onto its back, breaking its neck.²⁷

Scholars trying to make sense of the duel descriptions have come up with alternative interpretations than what is presented here. When the sagas were written, duels had long since ceased to be a common occurrence, and so liberties may have been taken with the details. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* describes the last duel to take place in Iceland, between Gunnlaugr ormstunga (serpent tongue) and Hrafn Öundurson, which occurred early in the 11th century. The next day, the Alþing abolished duels.²⁸

Since their duel ended in a draw that satisfied neither party, Gunnlaugr and Hrafn agreed to continue the fight in Norway, where duels were still permitted.

Rather than dueling, an injured party might simply take violent revenge. The law permitted a man who was seriously injured to avenge himself without penalty at any time up until the case was brought to court.²⁹ Revenge was not only an accepted tool to balance the scales of justice, but in some circumstances, it was a duty. While compensation satisfied the need for justice in many instances, there were others where no compensation would restore lost honor. Honorable men refused the shame of carrying their dead kinsmen as silver in their purse.³⁰

Revenge need not be worked upon the offender himself. It was equally effective to take vengeance against a closely related family member of equal status.³¹ In *Hrafnkels saga*, years after Sámur Bjarnason humiliated Hrafnkell Freysgoði, Hrafnkell began his revenge by attacking and killing Sámur's brother Eyvindr, who had just returned home from a seven-year trading voyage, and who had not been a party to any of the disputes between Sámur and Hrafnkell.³²

Honor, vengeance, and law all came together in the complex social algorithm of the feud. Many of the sagas center on a feud that drives the plot forward.

A classic example is found in *Hrafnkels saga*, a story that has been called one of the finest short novels in any language. Hrafnkell Freysgoði was a powerful and imperious goði in east Iceland. Young Einarr Þorbjarnarson, from a family without power or wealth, was hired by Hrafnkell as a shepherd. Einarr was killed by Hrafnkell after riding a forbidden horse. Hrafnkell had dedicated half of the stallion Freyfaxi to his favorite god, Freyr, and he had sworn to kill anyone who rode the horse.

Einarr's father Þorbjörn demanded compensation for the death of his son. Hrafnkell, feeling regret over his oath and the consequent killing, offered a generous settlement, but Þorbjörn insisted on an arbitrated settlement. Hrafnkell refused this request, because arbitration would only be appropriate in dealing with a social equal. Þorbjörn's nephew, Sámur Bjarnason, agreed to take over the case, a very unpromising arrangement, since Sámur was just as powerless as his uncle.

Despite their lack of power, influence, and connections, Sámur and Þorbjörn went to the Alþing and managed to interest two goðar from the West Fjords, who took on the case. Hrafnkell was outlawed, but he ignored the sentence and returned home, thinking his opponents were powerless to enforce the verdict.

Sámur and the men from the west took Hrafnkell by surprise in his home. Sámur confiscated Hrafnkell's property and authority and hung him by a rope through his heels in his own storehouse. Sámur, against the advice of his allies from the west, released Hrafnkell, granting him his life but banishing him from the valley.

Hrafnkell and his family traveled to another valley to establish a new farm and a new life. Hrafnkell flourished, gaining wealth and authority in his new home. He made good his revenge years later by killing Sámur's brother Eyvindr, and he followed up by capturing Sámur at his farm. Rather than killing his rival, Hrafnkell recouped his power and property, and sent Sámur to return to his previous modest position in life.

Many of the sagas follow a similar outline: the protagonists are introduced; a conflict arises; the conflict comes to a climax, usually involving bloodshed; revenge is extracted; a reconciliation is arranged; the aftermath is discussed.³³

In Iceland, feuds were a customary way of settling disagreements while

keeping conflicts at a minimum in the absence of any central authority. Characteristically, competition led to a disagreement, whether it was over a resource such as timber lands, or beached whales, or perhaps a woman desired by two different men, which started a series of escalating hostilities. Disagreements led to confrontations, in which the aggrieved party sought a settlement. Offers and counter-offers might be exchanged in the search for a mutually agreeable settlement.³⁴

It's likely that in many cases agreement was reached, and no blood was spilled. However, those instances are not the events about which sagas were written.

In the cases recorded in the sagas, it was more likely that the settlement was rejected, leading to heated words, then insults and other words meant to dishonor. The disagreement often escalated to minor violence, to seizure and destruction of property, and then to injuries and killing.

As the disagreement grew in scope, men sought the support of others to help them in their struggle, bringing larger groups of men in to the feud. The allies might be family members or neighbors, but typically, support of more powerful people was sought. As a result, the hostilities moved up the social scale.

A farmer having a disagreement with a neighboring farmer might ask his *goði* to serve as his advocate. The *goði* rounded up men to support him, forcing the other farmer to go to his *goði* to do the same, bringing more and more people in to the struggle. One *goði* might ask other *goðar* for support, forcing the *goði* on the other side of the dispute to follow suit, further escalating the magnitude of the conflict.

When the conflict reached the stage where it threatened the order of the society, it was halted, typically by the intervention of third parties who had links to both sides of the dispute, but who were not necessarily related by kinship.

Usually, the two parties entered into some form of arbitration. Advocates might broker an arrangement, seeking to balance the loss of life, loss of property, and loss of honor. Advocates could force the two parties to come together by threatening to upset the balance of power, either by withdrawing support from one side, or by throwing support to the other side. The threatened change in balance could force the two conflicting parties into negotiations.

Occasionally, the solution was a duel between the leading men on each side of the feud. More often, the solution involved payments of tangibles (such as silver) or intangibles (such as a *goðorð* or similar authority).³⁵ Solutions also involved sentences of outlawry. Since it was necessary that the solution stick in the absence of any police force or other authority, the resolution of a feud sometimes included a rearrangement of family ties, such as marriages, or the exchange of foster-children, to bind the two sides together.

The formal court system of Iceland usually did not provide the function of halting the feud. Rather, the courts were often used as a way to escalate the feud as one side forced a legal judgment upon the other. Court cases were some-

times used as a way to search for a settlement, rather than forming the basis of the settlement.³⁶

The state in saga-age Iceland was based on a delicate balance between moderation, on one hand, and aggression, on the other.³⁷ Icelanders differed from other feuding societies in world history in that Icelanders were much more willing to find a compromise.³⁸ Prolonged violence was not economically feasible; Iceland was a farming society, not a military society.

In addition, Icelandic society had many affinity groups, which could limit the size of the feud. There existed kin groups, *goðar-þingmenn* groups, and other friendship groups. As a feud grew, individuals might easily find themselves with conflicting loyalties because they belonged to groups having loyalties on both sides of the feud. When the feud grew too large, some people might be forced to switch sides or withdraw support from the feud.

When large groups assembled for combat during a feud, it usually signaled consensus—that violence had escalated to the level where it was time to reach a settlement.³⁹

Viking-age Weapons

Given the importance of maintaining honor against even the slightest provocation, it is no surprise that weapons were a part of everyday life in saga-age Iceland. A violent attack to restore lost honor could take place at any time against any man. The sagas are filled with examples of unexpected violent attacks with lethal intent during the most mundane moments: at the dinner table,⁴⁰ on the way to the privy,⁴¹ while sleeping in bed,⁴² while working the farm fields,⁴³ while playing ball games.⁴⁴ To be prepared for these kinds of unpredictable attacks, free men carried their weapons with them routinely.

Hávamál warns that a man should be prepared to fight at any moment, day or night. You should never be more than one pace away from your weapon because you don't know for certain when you might need it.⁴⁵

The sagas suggest that men carried their weapons not only while traveling away from home, but also at home while performing everyday activities. After dressing one morning, Höskuldr Þráinsson picked up his seed bag in one hand and his sword in the other and went out to work the fields at his farm.⁴⁶

Weapons were kept at hand in the house: hung on the wall over the bed, ready for instant use. Most saga-age Icelanders were armed for battle with a shield and a weapon, typically an axe, a spear, or a sword.⁴⁷

Viking-age people used large, round, wooden shields. A typical shield was 32 to 36 inches (80 to 90 centimeters) in diameter. They were gripped in the center behind an iron boss, which protected the hand.

The shield was probably rimmed with leather or rawhide to keep the shield from splitting when hit on edge. A leather sling, used to carry the shield over

the shoulder, was common. There are many instances in the stories in which a fighter threw his shield over his back in order to wield his weapon with two hands.

Shields were typically from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (6 to 13 millimeters) thick and weighed 9 to 18 pounds (4 to 8 kilograms).

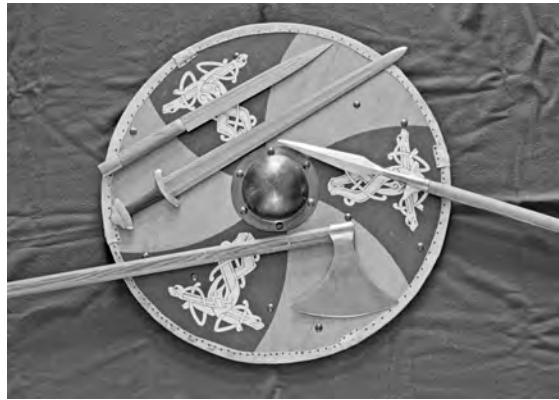
The Viking shield makes for a very effective defense. It blocks attacks to many possible targets simultaneously. Besides its obvious defensive uses, the shield can also be used offensively. The edge of the shield can be used for punching, turning it into a very effective set of “brass knuckles.” If a combatant does not take care to control his opponent’s shield, he may quickly find his teeth have been knocked out. In *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappi*, Björn Hitdælakappi drove his shield into his opponent’s head to kill him.⁴⁸

The use of shields was probably universal. Someone without a shield would be, quite literally, defenseless. As a result, most everyone had a shield.

The stories say that occasionally, some men chose not to carry a shield, notably when they carried a two-handed weapon, or a different weapon in each hand. Gunnarr Hámundarson carried his *atgeirr* (halberd) in one hand and a sword in the other at the battle at Eystrí-Rangá in south Iceland. Thinking him defenseless, Þorgeirr Starkaðarson urged his brothers Börkr and Þorkell to charge at Gunnarr together. “He has no shield, and we’ll have his life in our hands.”⁴⁹ Gunnarr had other ideas, and he knocked Börkr’s sword out of his hand with his *atgeirr* while slicing off Þorkell’s head with his sword.

Other defenses included helmet, for head protection, and a mail shirt, for body protection. Because iron was difficult to produce in this era, iron was expensive. Therefore, prestige items such as helmet and mail were rare in saga-age Iceland.

When we moderns think of Viking-age weapons today, we usually think first of the battle axe, and the image that forms in the mind is a massive weapon that only a troll could wield. In reality, battle axes in the saga age were light, fast, and well-balanced, and they were capable of speedy, deadly attacks, as well as a variety of nasty tricks.



While virtually every fighting man used a large, round, wooden shield, few men could afford the fine, prestigious weapons shown (from top): sax, sword, spear, and axe. Most men made do with a single weapon, such as a spear, which was the most commonly used weapon in the Viking age (author photograph).

The curved shape of the head allowed the axe to be used to hook an opponent's ankle, throwing him off balance and onto the ground. The pointed "horns" at each end of the axehead (*øxarhyrna*) could be used offensively as was done by Kolbeinn Þorljótsson in *Grænlendinga þáttur*. He drove the horn of his axe into Þórðr's throat, killing him.⁵⁰

Axes were sometimes used to strike a blow that was not intended to be lethal. The *øxarhamar* (axe hammer), the backside of the axe head, was used for that purpose. Sometimes, the blow was made to humiliate an opponent, and in other cases, it was made against an opponent so inferior that he didn't seem worthy of a proper blow.

The spear was the most commonly used weapon in the saga age. It was often the choice of someone who was unable to afford a prestige weapon like a sword.

During the saga age, spear heads took many forms. Earlier spearheads were about 8 inches (20 centimeters) long, while later ones were as long as 24 inches (60 centimeters). The spearheads were made of iron, and they were frequently decorated with inlays of precious metals or with scribed geometric patterns. The heads were fixed to wooden spear shafts using a rivet. The shaft and head had a combined length of 6.5 to 10 feet (2 to 3 meters) long, although longer shafts may have been used.

Many people think of the spear as a throwing weapon. The story of the first battle in the world is told in several sources, including the poem *Völuspá*. As a prelude to the battle, Óðinn, the highest of the gods, threw a spear over the heads of the opposing combatants.⁵¹

While spears were certainly used that way when men, and not gods, fought, there's a disadvantage to throwing your weapon away in a fight. Not only do you lose your weapon, but you risk having your opponent pick it up and use it against you if you miss. Worse, your weapon may be caught in flight and flung back at you, a trick used on occasion by Gunnarr Hámundarson in *Brennu-Njáls saga*.⁵²

More commonly, the spear was used as a thrusting weapon, allowing for much greater reach than a sword or an axe. The sagas say that when used two handed, a spear provided a combatant with enough leverage to lift his opponent up off his feet, impaled on the tip of the spear. Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsson did just that with Earl Hringr in a battle.⁵³

Bows and arrows were used throughout the Viking lands, but primarily for hunting, rather than for combat. Arrow heads are rarely found in the graves of warriors. In mass battles on land and on sea, arrows were fired before men closed to fight in close quarters.

In Iceland, there were fewer reasons to use bows than in other Viking lands. There was little game to hunt, and mass battles were rare. Regardless, they did see use in combat. Iceland's most celebrated archer was Gunnarr Hámundarson, who single-handedly defended his home at Hlíðarendi in south

Iceland against an attack. He killed or wounded ten of the attackers with his bow before his bowstring was cut.⁵⁴

A sax is a short sword that was more commonly used during the early part of the saga age. It's a one-handed single edged weapon with a blade length ranging from 12 to 24 inches (30 to 60 centimeters). Saxes usually had simple fittings and no crossguard. Some men preferred a sax over a sword for fighting. Grettir Ásmundarson preferred his sax, called *Kársnautr* (Kárr's gift), which he took from Kárr's grave mound when he was in Norway.⁵⁵ Compared to swords, saxes were typically more crudely fabricated. Rather than being crafted by skilled, specialized smiths, saxes were probably made by local smiths. Blades tended to be heavier and thicker than sword blades.

More than anything else, the sword was the mark of a warrior in the Viking age. Swords were difficult to make, and therefore rare and expensive. The author of *Fóstbræðra saga* said that in saga-age Iceland, few men were armed with swords.⁵⁶

A sword might be the most expensive item that a man owned. The one sword whose value is given in the sagas, given by King Hákon to Höskuldr Kollsson, was said to be worth a half mark of gold.⁵⁷ In saga-age Iceland, that represented the value of sixteen milk-cows, a treasure when even a single milk-cow might mean the difference between surviving and starving to death over the winter.

Swords in the saga age were typically double edged and were used single handed, since the other hand was busy holding the shield. Blades ranged from 24 to 36 inches (60 to 90 centimeters) long, although 28 to 32 inches (70 to 80 centimeters) was typical.

Decorative techniques were sometimes used on the blade, including inlays of iron, silver, or gold. In some cases, the inlays were simply decorative, but in other cases, they indicated the maker's name. Most of the swords in the Viking lands appear to have come from the Frankish lands in continental Europe, in what is now Germany.

Sword blades from the saga age were far from ideal. *Laxdæla saga* tells of Bolli Þorleiksson's ambush of Kjartan Ólafsson. Several times during the battle, Kjartan's blade bent, and so he had to straighten his blade by standing on it.⁵⁸ In *Þorsfirðinga saga*, Þorbjörn stokkr swung his sword at Þórir Oddsson, but the sword blade broke when it struck Þórir's helmet.⁵⁹

Swords were highly prized during the saga era and were used for generations. When a young man, Grettir Ásmundarson prepared to leave Iceland to travel to Norway. His father, Ásmundur Þorgrímsson, had a low opinion of Grettir and refused to give him a sword, saying, "I don't know what useful work you would do with weapons."⁶⁰ His mother, Ásdís Bárðardóttir, who was more supportive, gave Grettir the sword owned by her grandfather Jökull Ingimundarson.

Archaeological evidence also supports the long and continued use of sword

blades. Early Viking-age blades fitted with 11th century crossguards have been found, suggesting that sword blades several centuries old continued to be maintained and used.

Viking Raids

Within Icelandic society, custom and law served to restrain violence, but no such restrictions applied outside of their homeland. The sagas suggest that participation in Viking raids in Europe was not uncommon among the Icelanders, and the stories themselves give witness to Icelanders' enduring memory of the deeds of the Vikings long after the Viking age was over. The raids are the aspect of Viking society that most strongly captures modern popular imagination.

It's worth noting that the Viking peoples were not the only raiders in Europe at this time. What made the Viking raids so notable was their success, due in large part to the superiority of Viking ships, and their extent, well outside the borders of the Viking lands. While the Viking raiders were called "a filthy pestilence," "unspeakable evil," and "a most vile people" by contemporary English historians,⁶¹ the Vikings themselves didn't see these raids as vile or contemptible — quite the opposite.

Raiding was thought to be a desirable experience for a young man, although a more mature man was expected to settle down on a farm and raise a family. Raiding was a way for a young man to prove himself, returning home with increased wealth and honor.

Ketill Ormsson expressed this perspective in *Vatnsdæla saga*, when he rebuked his son for failing to root out a nearby highwayman who had killed dozens of travelers:

The ways of young folks today aren't like what they were when I was young. Back then, men were eager to do some notable deed, either taking part in a raid, or gaining wealth and honor in expeditions that called for manliness. But nowadays young folks prefer to be stay-at-homes, sitting at the kitchen fire and filling their bellies with mead and small beer.... You're now at an age where it's time to put yourself to the test, and find out what fate has in store for you.⁶²

In the minds of the Vikings, raiding was very distinct from theft. Theft was abhorrent: the work of a coward and *níðingr*. Raiding, on the other hand, was an honorable challenge to a fight, with the victor earning honor and keeping the spoils in reward for his martial prowess.

The distinction is vividly evoked in *Egils saga*. While raiding a coastal farm in Kúrland on the Baltic Sea, Egill Skalla-Grímsson and his men were captured by the farmer and his men, who bound up the raiders. During the night, Egill managed to slip his bonds. He and his men grabbed their captors' treasure and headed back to their ship. Along the way, Egill was struck with remorse: "This

journey is terrible and hardly suitable for a warrior. We have stolen the farmer's money without his knowledge. We should never allow such shame to befall us."⁶³

Egill returned to the farmer's house, set it ablaze, and killed the occupants as they tried to escape the smoke and flames. He then returned to the ship with his self-esteem restored and his honor enhanced; he had challenged the farmer and won.

The raids were usually opportunistic, against targets that could be attacked, plundered, and departed from quickly. Vikings stayed along the coast or on navigable rivers; overland marches were avoided. The goal was to grab as much valuable booty as possible before an effective defense could be raised.

The size of the raiding parties varied. The brothers Egill and Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsón led a small raiding party consisting of separate groups of twelve men each from their shared longship.⁶⁴ A larger party is described in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Gunnarr Hámundarson and Hallvarðr hvíti (white) began their raiding with two ships. Hallvarðr's kinsman Ölvir gave them two more longships, one with forty oars, and one with sixty. At the end of the summer, they returned from their raids with ten ships.⁶⁵ One of the largest raiding parties was the so-called Great Army which harried in England and on the continent and which probably numbered a few thousand warriors.

The Viking raiders depended on the superiority of their ships in order to make their raids a success. The shallow draft of Viking-age ships meant that they could navigate shallow bays and rivers where other contemporary ships couldn't sail. The broad bottom of the Viking ships made it possible to land on any sandy beach, rather than requiring a harbor or jetty or other prepared landing spot. These two factors made it possible for Vikings to land and raid in places that their victims thought it impossible to land, contributing to the surprise of the raids. Additionally, the efficiency of Viking ships under sail meant they could outrun contemporary ships under favorable conditions. The combination of sail and oar meant that Viking ships could outrun contemporary ships under unfavorable conditions as well. These two factors made it possible for Viking raiders to depart from a raid with little danger from any defenders who might try to give chase.

The cruel and bloody portrayal of these raids has probably been overstated. The sadistic ritual killings such as the "blood-eagle"⁶⁶ and the self-evisceration⁶⁷ described in the sagas are almost certainly later literary inventions.⁶⁸ Popular notions of Viking raiders, such as their drinking from the skulls of their defeated enemies, are embellishments by Romantic translators, unfamiliar with the language and the poetic diction of the old Icelandic texts.

Fighting Men in the Saga Age

In saga-age Iceland, there was never anything like a central authority, and thus, there were never any standing troops. When needed, *goðar* called on their *þingmenn* for armed support. Since their *þingmenn* were virtually all farmers, fighting men in Iceland were farmers.

In addition, other men, such as outlaws, routinely used weapons. Slaves were sometimes given weapons by their owners, along with orders to use them for an assassination. Vigfúss Bjarnarson offered his slave Svartr inn sterki (the strong) his freedom if he were to kill Snorri *goði*.⁶⁹ Vigfúss gave the slave an *atgeirr* (halberd) along with detailed instructions on how to do the job. Svartr was incompetent with weapons, and the attempt failed. Snorri killed Vigfúss but spared all his slaves.

In the early part of the Viking age, there was no central authority in the other Scandinavian lands, either. Petty kings, earls, and powerful men ruled, gathering armed support from farmers in their districts as needed.

By the time that Iceland was settled, these petty kings and earls had consolidated their power and authority, and they ruled over large portions of their lands. To maintain that rule, these leaders needed armed men to carry out their commands. Thus, they maintained standing troops, gathering armed men around them to serve them.

These men were also known as *húskarl*, a word whose meaning depended on in which land it was being applied. In Iceland, a *húskarl* (house man) was a servant, a hand on the farm. In other lands, the term was also applied to the king's men, the armed men of the king's household.

Young saga-age Icelanders who went abroad sometimes became men of the king or earl (*konungs-menn*), serving as armed men or bodyguards. It was a way for a young man to prove himself, winning fame, honor, and wealth. *Brennu-Njáls saga* says that Kári Sölmundarson was a retainer (*hirðmaðr*) of Earl Sigurðr when he joined Helgi and Grímr Njálsson in a sea battle against some Viking raiders. Kári brought his new companions back to the earl and asked him to accept the brothers as his men.⁷⁰ After the brothers fought bravely for the earl, he accepted them as his *hirðmenn*.⁷¹

Sometimes young Icelanders abroad battled with *hirðmenn*, as did Grettir Ásmundarson on his first visit to Norway. Grettir had killed Björn, and so Björn's brother Hjarrandi, a *hirðmaðr* of the earl Sveinn Hákonarson, attempted to kill Grettir to avenge the death. Grettir and his friend Arnbjörn killed Hjarrandi and four of his five companions.⁷²

The sagas occasionally mention *berserks*, warriors with exceptional ferocity and strength, some of whom had supernatural powers. They rarely are found in Iceland in the sagas. More commonly, they are encountered by Icelanders in other Viking lands.

The sagas don't seem to agree on just what it is that made someone a

berserk. It's not clear that the word (*berserkr*) had a consistent meaning in the saga age.

Some berserks were valiant warriors, admired for their prowess in battles, and they were often the vanguard of the king's fighters. Other berserks seem to have been thoroughly evil men, roaming the countryside challenging weaker men to duels. Others were cowards and bullies, unable to fight effectively at all. In some cases, the word was applied to any hard fighter. Perhaps the word had multiple meanings in the saga age.

The berserks who served the king of Norway defended the bow of his ship. *Vatnsdæla saga* says that they used wolf-skin cloaks (*vargstakkr*) as their mail shirts (*brynja*), and so they were called Wolf-Skins (*úlfhédinn*).⁷³ They fought ferociously for the king.

Other berserks could enter a trance-like rage (*berserksgangr*), exhibiting extraordinary strength. Once in this frenzied state, they were not like human beings, but more like animals. They howled like wild animals, and they bit the edge of their shields. The image of a berserk biting his shield has been preserved in a 12th century chess piece, found at the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides.⁷⁴

These berserks had no fear of fire or iron. Swords would not bite them, and they could walk through fire without being burned. In several cases, Christian priests used this fearlessness of fire to their advantage to show the superiority of the new Christian faith. The sagas say that berserks walked unharmed through normal fires and through fires blessed by heathens, but were stopped by fires blessed by priests.⁷⁵

A berserk could blunt his opponent's weapon by looking at it. Gunnlaugr ormstunga challenged the berserk Þórormr to a duel, but Gunnlaugr had been warned of the berserk's powers. When Þórormr asked to see Gunnlaugr's weapon before the fight, Gunnlaugr drew his sword for inspection. Yet when the fight began, Gunnlaugr switched to a different sword that had been hanging from his wrist by a loop. The berserk, not realizing he had looked at and



The image of a berserk is preserved in this 12th century chessman found on the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides. The term was applied to several types of fighting men in the sagas, including warriors of exceptional strength and ferocity having supernatural powers. When the berserk rage came upon them, they howled like animals and bit the edge of their shields. The original chess piece was probably carved in Norway and is made from walrus ivory. The photograph shows a casting made from the original (author photograph).

blunted a different weapon, left himself exposed, and Gunnlaugr's first blow killed the berserk.⁷⁶

Some berserks were shape-changers (*hamrammr*), taking on characteristics of wild animals. When they charged into battle, they were unstoppable, but when the frenzy wore off, they were exhausted and powerless and had to lie down to rest.⁷⁷ Chapter 6 of *Ynglinga saga* says that these skills were first taught to men by Óðinn, the highest of the gods.⁷⁸

Some modern scholars have suggested that berserks used medicinal herbs or other drugs to enter their trance state. To my knowledge, there is little in the sagas or in other sources to suggest that foreign materials were needed to bring on this frenzied state.

Even the etymology of the word *berserkr* is debated. Some have suggested the word derives from "bare shirted," since berserks went into battle without mail, and thus bare of any armor. Others suggest an older German derivation meaning "bear shirt," since these men wore the skins of animals, which could have included bear skins.⁷⁹ Both suggestions would seem to have problems. Although the medieval historian Snorri Sturluson endorsed the first explanation,⁸⁰ the second now seems more likely.

In some sagas, berserks are utterly evil men, traveling the countryside challenging farmers to duels, with their property, their wealth, and the wives at stake. Even the berserks' names suggest evil: Ótryggr (Untrustworthy), who was bested by Þangbrandr the priest,⁸¹ and Ljótr inn bleiki (Ugly the pale), who dueled with Egill Skala-Grímsson.⁸² Ljótr was not merely ugly and hideous (*ljótr*), he was pale and wan (*bleikr*) to boot. When Ljótr approached the dueling place, a berserk fit came over him, and he howled horribly and bit his shield.⁸³

In the sagas, berserks sometimes appear as stock characters. They are suitable villains for the saga hero to vanquish. *Eyrbyggja saga* tells the story of Halli and Leiknir, two berserks who were given to Styrr Þorgrímsson goða.⁸⁴ At first, Styrr was able to put them to good use against his enemies, but later, the berserks became troublesome. Halli asked for the hand of Styrr's daughter in marriage, which would have been a disgrace for Styrr's family. Styrr went to Snorri goði for advice, and he devised a plan.⁸⁵

Styrr told the berserks that they must prove themselves worthy of the marriage by building a road through an impassible lava field. When they finished the arduous task, Styrr invited the berserks to take a hot bath and to prepare for their wedding. They accepted his offer, but Styrr locked them in the bathhouse and then made the room unbearably hot. As the berserks broke down the door to escape the heat, Styrr killed them with a spear as they burst out of the house. He buried them in a deep hole alongside the path through the lava.⁸⁶ The grave mound is still visible next to the path.

Some berserks in the sagas seem to have been merely incompetent. Björn járnhauð (iron-skull) was a great bully who came to a house where Glúmr



Berserks are often stock characters in the sagas, placed to serve as villains for the saga hero to vanquish. Styrr was given two berserks who quickly became troublesome. When they asked for the hand of Styrr's daughter in marriage, he set them a task to prove themselves worthy: building a path through this impassible lava field. When the task was finished, Styrr killed both the berserks and buried them in the mound visible in the foreground of the photograph, alongside the path (author photograph).

Eyjólfsson was a guest, as is told in *Víga-Glúms saga*. When the bully turned to insulting Glúmr as he sat on the bench, Glúmr jumped up, grabbed a burning log from the fire, and started beating Björn on the shoulders and head. Björn, stumbling and falling under the rain of blows, barely got out the door. The next day, his death was reported.⁸⁷

In some cases, strong fighters were called berserks, even though there is nothing in the saga to suggest that they entered a battle frenzy or took on other aspects of a berserk during their fights. Helgi Harðbeinsson is called a berserk in *Laxdæla saga*.⁸⁸ In the brutal fight that developed later, nothing in Helgi's actions suggests a berserk frenzy.⁸⁹

CHAPTER 6

Milestones in Life

Icelanders in the saga age had many of the same milestones in life as people from other cultures and other historical periods. Each of the stages of life: birth, childhood, maturity, marriage, and death brought different challenges, different responsibilities and different expected behaviors.

The rituals and behaviors at these milestones changed when Christianity was adopted in Iceland in the year 1000. Some of the pagan practices were replaced with sacraments of the church. Yet, in some cases, Icelanders continued their accustomed practices well past the official conversion and past the end of the saga age.

Birth and Infancy

The sagas have little to say about conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, and when they do make reference, the texts are oblique and euphemistic.¹

Women probably continued with their normal work up until the last moments before birth. A counter-example in the sagas is Friðgerður, a pregnant woman working on a farm. She asked the farmer for some help and relief from her duties, because she was getting larger and not moving about so easily. In referring to her pregnancy, Friðgerður said, “Now I am an un-well woman.”²

Despite the infrequent mentions in the sagas, it’s clear that sex was often on the minds of the people in this society,³ and one has the sense that gossip and discussion of what couples were doing privately was common. For example, the shipmates of Grettir Ásmundarson thought he was “stroking the belly” of the steersman’s wife, rather than working.⁴

Coupling most typically took place in bed at night,⁵ with the male taking the lead. Since virtually the entire household slept together on open benches in the longhouse, it’s unlikely that there was much privacy in these intimate moments. The law-code stated that a marriage was considered to be legal when six witnesses saw the newlyweds openly go to bed together.⁶

Gísla saga describes a moment of intimacy between Þorgrímur Þorsteins-son and his wife Þórdís Súrsdóttir. Discussion of these moments is unusual in

the sagas, but in this case, it is central to the plot. Þórdís's brother, Gísli Súrson had made his way unnoticed into their darkened house at night to take his revenge on Þorgrímr. Approaching their bed, he reached out to Þórdís, who lay on the outside, and touched her breast. She awoke, and thinking her husband had laid his arm over her, she woke him to ask why his hand was so cold. He asked, "Do you want me to turn towards you?" a euphemism for coupling.⁷ Gísli waited. He then touched Þorgrímr. Thinking his wife had responded, Þorgrímr turned toward her, putting him in the perfect position for Gísli to drive his spear through Þorgrímr.⁸

When a child was delivered, the mother probably most often delivered from behind while kneeling on the floor with the help of other women on the farm. It's possible that there were women who were especially skilled at assisting with the birthing process and who took on the role of midwife.⁹ The sagas are completely silent on the details of the birthing. Mothers probably returned to work almost immediately.

It has long been thought that a large percentage of infants died shortly after birth, but some studies have refuted that belief.¹⁰ Regardless, the sagas record that some couples had many children before one survived. *Egils saga* says that Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson and Bera Yngvarsdóttir had many children, but at first, they were all "without breath" and lifeless.¹¹

A newborn was accepted into the family by means of a set of rituals. The mother accepted the child by nursing it at her breast. The father showed acceptance by taking the infant onto his knee, by giving the child a name, and by sprinkling water on the child. Once the infant was named, sprinkled, and suckled, then the Norse inheritance laws came into play, and the baby had inheritance and other rights within the family.¹²

The sprinkling ritual (*ausa vatni*) is ancient, appearing in old poems that pre-date the Christian era,¹³ and so it is thought to be unrelated to the Christian rite of baptism.

The acceptance ritual was rather straightforward when father and mother were married, but when the child was illegitimate, complications ensued. It was important to identify the father, since he and his family were responsible for the child's care up until the age of sixteen.¹⁴ Unmarried woman might travel to be close to the father when the child was due so that the father could accept the infant, lest her family have to support the child.

Identifying the father was so important to the woman's family that if a pregnant woman refused to identify the father, the law permitted force to be used against her to make her divulge the name, as long as the force resulted in no permanent injuries or visible marks.¹⁵

Illegitimacy was no shame. Men took advantage of their slaves, or had concubines for their pleasure. Höskuldr Dala-Kollsson bought the slave Melkorka Mýrkjartansdóttir in Norway to use as his concubine. He brought her back to his home and his wife in Iceland, where he established her in his house, and

later when his wife objected, in another house. Melkorka gave birth to a boy, which Höskuldr accepted and named Óláfr.¹⁶

In Iceland, an illegitimate child had no claim to his father's estate, although with the consent of the legitimate sons, a father could give the child gifts. When Höskuldr neared death, he tricked his two legitimate sons into agreeing to allow Óláfr a much larger share of the estate than that to which he was entitled.¹⁷

Some illegitimate children were very much a part of the family. Njáll Þorgeirsson had a son Höskuldr with Hróðný Höskuldsdóttir at a time when Njáll was married to Bergþóra Skarpheðinsdóttir and having children with her.¹⁸ Höskuldr was a part of Njáll's household, traveling with Njáll's sons to feasts, such as to Gunnarr Hámundarson's wedding.¹⁹ When Höskuldr was killed, his mother collected the body and took it to Njáll's farm at Bergþórshváll. Arriving at night, Hróðný pushed past the servant who opened the door and went to the bed where Njáll was sleeping with his wife Bergþóra. "Get up from your bed and that other women, and come outside with me, along with her and your sons, too."²⁰

They went out and viewed Höskuldr's body. Njáll's son, Skarpheðinn, performed the ritual of closing Höskuldr's eyes and nostrils. Hróðný placed the responsibility for avenging Höskuldr's death in Skarpheðinn's hands, and Bergþóra egged her sons on, telling the young men that it was necessary to take vengeance immediately.²¹ The sons of Njáll gathered their weapons and rode away at once.

An infant that was not accepted for one reason or another was put to death by exposure (*bera út*). The unwanted baby was put outside, exposed to the elements, until death ensued. Exposure usually was performed only in cases of birth deformity, or of economic hardship, but may have been performed based on the sex, appearance, or apparent health of the infant.

Harðar saga tells of Signý Valbrandsdóttir, who fell ill while away from home visiting family. She went into labor, and after a difficult time, she gave birth to a healthy girl. Her brother, Torfi Valbrandsson, had no love for Signý's husband, and he would not allow the baby to be sprinkled until they knew whether Signý would live or not.

Signý died, and Torfi wanted the baby to be exposed. He told his foster-son Sigurðr Torfáfóstri to throw the infant in the river. Sigurðr took the baby away but couldn't bring himself to kill the infant. He left her in the gateway of Grímr inn litli's (the short) farm, who was Signý's foster-son.

The infant was quickly discovered. Grímr took the infant home and had his wife Helga pretend to go into labor and say the baby was hers. The infant was sprinkled and named Þorbjörg.

Torfi discovered the ruse and was furious. He wanted the child dead, but since she had been sprinkled, it would have been murder to bring about her death. Torfi took the infant and gave her to a slave to nurse.²²

Infants were nursed until the age of two years, based on evidence from the law codes.²³ Since there was no place for another infant until the previous one was weaned, it's been suggested that children were spaced by this interval.²⁴ Some couples had many children. Snorri goði and Hallfríðr Einarsdóttir, his third wife, had thirteen children together.²⁵

When Christianity was adopted in Iceland in the year 1000, the birth practices and rituals did not immediately change. Infanticide was still permitted, along with some other heathen practices, such as the eating of horsemeat.²⁶

Presumably, these practices were allowed to continue because to ban them would have had a significant economic impact on the society. Later, King Óláfr inn helgi (the holy) of Norway learned that these practices were still being followed in Iceland.²⁷ He sent word to the law-speaker, Skapti Þóroddsson, asking that the practices be stopped,²⁸ which was implemented around the year 1016.

When the Christian law-codes were written down nearly a century later, they required that newborns be baptized immediately. Thus, paternal acceptance of newborns was replaced with universal acceptance of all infants by the church.²⁹

Childhood

Children in saga-age Iceland did many of the same things as children in other times and cultures, and a few that were different. They played with wooden and bronze figures, including dolls, ships, and horses.³⁰ They played make-believe, building play houses.³¹ They played games, both board-games³² and sporting competitions.³³ They composed poetry.³⁴ They killed for revenge, attacking both adults³⁵ and other children.³⁶

Children were, to a large degree, considered to be small adults. They were expected to contribute to the success of the farm through their labor to the best of their abilities, just like an adult.

In a few cases, the chores assigned specifically to children are listed in the sagas. Two Icelandic poets, Sneglu-Halli (Sarcastic Halli) and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson each tried to put down the other poet in the presence of King Haraldr Sigurðarson by reciting poetry describing the demeaning chores assigned to the other as a child. Þjóðólfr was obliged to carry the ashes out of the house as a child, because he didn't seem fit for anything else. Halli tended cows.³⁷

As a boy, Grettir Ásmundarson was assigned the chore of raising goslings, and later, of taking care of the mare Kengala.³⁸ Grettir, who felt the chores were beneath him, did them poorly, killing the goslings and flaying the skin off of the mare.

Children were shielded from some portions of saga-age society, notably from the violence of the saga age. Violence against a child was considered

abhorrent, and many examples from the sagas tell us that when a child was injured during a fight, even accidentally, honorable men immediately banded together to hunt down and kill the person responsible.

Laxdæla saga tells of Þórólfr stertimaðr (stuck-up man) and Þórðr, who argued on several matters. The conflict escalated when Þórðr killed a bull belonging to Þórólfr. Þórólfr promised something just as unpleasant to Þórðr in return. Þórólfr saw Þórðr's young son Óláfr playing outside, and Þórólfr ran him through with his spear. Óláfr was seven or eight years old. Þórólfr found few who would assist or protect him after such a cowardly deed. As Þórólfr made ready to flee Iceland, Bolli Bollason rode up and sliced him in two with his sword.³⁹

There was no formal education of children as such. Children learned the skills they needed by participating in the running of the farm. Children were expected to work hard, alongside the adults of the farm. Boys were taught by their fathers, their brothers, and by their mother's brother, who was held to have a special responsibility for a boy. Girls were taught by their mothers, their sisters, and by other women on the farm.

Víglundar saga says that Þorgrímr Eiríksson spared no efforts to teach his two sons, Víglundr and Trausti all sorts of skills.⁴⁰ Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir was the same age as Víglundr and grew up in the same district, but her mother, Þorbjörg Einarsdóttir, refused to teach her any crafts. Ketilríðr's father Hólmkell Álfarínsson thought this refusal was a disgrace.⁴¹

The sagas sometimes say that a child was a *kolbítr* (coal-biter), a lazy idle child who lounged around the kitchen fire, "chewing" on the coals of the fire and staying warm while everyone else was working outside. *Egils saga* says that Þórðr beigaldi (hobbler) was a *kolbítr*,⁴² but as with many such children in the sagas, he later turned into a capable man. When Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson went to meet the king, he took the strongest and boldest of men with him, including Þórðr.

The author of *Grettis saga* says that Grettir Ásmundarson did not lounge about the fire hall,⁴³ implying he was no *kolbítr*, even though he was willful and a prankster. Bold, strong-willed children were admired, as these were desirable traits in Viking society.⁴⁴

Occasionally, older children went to live with other families in order to learn special skills. When he was twelve years old, Gunnlaugr ormstunga went to the farm at Borg to study law with Þorsteinn Egilsson for a year.⁴⁵ The author adds that Gunnlaugr spent a lot of time playing board games with Þorsteinn's daughter Helga, and that they took a liking to one another.

During the saga age, it was not uncommon for a family to give one of their children to another family to foster. It was a bond that could link a family to its social superior. Typically, a child, usually a boy, from a superior family was raised by an inferior family.⁴⁶ The sagas say that someone who fosters another's child is the lesser man.⁴⁷

Fostering was not the same as adoption. It was a legal agreement, and an alliance, which could create a new bond between families, or strengthen a weakened bond. Ties between foster-relations could be as strong or stronger than those between blood-relations.⁴⁸

Óláfr pái, who was illegitimate, wanted to smooth the hard feelings between him and his legitimate brother, Þorleikr Höskuldsson. Óláfr offered to foster Þorleikr's three year old son, Bolli. Þorleikr felt the offer did him great honor, and he agreed to it.⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, Hólmkell Álfarinsson was distressed that his wife would not teach their daughter Ketilríðr any of the women's crafts she needed. He asked Ólof Þórisdóttir, the mother of Trausti and Víglundr, to foster his daughter so that she could teach the girl the skills she needed. Ólof accepted with delight, and she loved her foster-daughter greatly.⁵⁰

A large percentage of the population during the saga age was comprised of children. It's been suggested that 45 percent of the late Viking-age Scandinavian population was under the age of fifteen.⁵¹ It was necessary to bear many children to ensure that at least some of them would reach adulthood. Childhood diseases, such as measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, and scarlet fever, resulted in the death of many children before they reached maturity, since little could be done to prevent or to cure the diseases.⁵²

Children's graves rarely turn up in archaeological studies. It's possible that mortuary practices were different for children than for adults in the saga age. It's also possible that small child-sized bones do not survive as well as the more robust bones in adult remains.

The children's graves that are found occasionally include grave goods, some of which show a tender and caring attitude towards the child on the part of the parents. Children's graves sometimes contain child-sized weapons, such as the grave at Straumur in east Iceland. The remains are of a child about ten years old, and he was found with fragments thought to be a wooden toy boat, along with a small axe and knife.⁵³

Maturity

At some point in his life, a boy was expected to take on the responsibilities of a man, and a girl to take on those of a woman. That transition, by and large, appeared not to have a fixed boundary in saga-age Iceland. The age of majority is not clearly defined in the literary sources.

The law codes in *Grágás* say that a man sixteen years or more can arrange for his own residence, while an unmarried woman had to be twenty years or older.⁵⁴ Yet the law says that to be a judge, a man had to have a settled home, but he need be only twelve years old.⁵⁵ Another law says that a man must be sixteen years old in order to claim land.⁵⁶ *Vatnsdæla saga* says that when Ingólfr

Þorsteinsson died, his sons Surtr and Högni were too young to take over his goðorð, his office of chieftancy.⁵⁷ They were fifteen and eleven years old.⁵⁸

These literary sources suggest that the age of majority was sixteen years for men. Regardless of the laws, the one event that clearly marked the transition to adulthood for both men and woman was marriage.

Prior to marriage, a woman was likely to stay home. An unmarried man, however, engaged in a number of activities, all of which provided evidence to the community that he had become a man.

Generally these activities involved putting the young man to the test, and sometimes involved foreign travel. Young men in saga-age Iceland went overseas for trade, for raids, for service to a foreign king, and for adventure. Ketill Ormsson told his son that he was of an age where he should put himself to the test to see what fate had in store for him.⁵⁹

All of these adventures required some amount of wealth, usually provided by the young man's father. Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson equipped his son Þórólfr for his first voyage to Norway.⁶⁰

Snorri Þorgrímsson was fourteen years old when he traveled to Norway with his foster brothers. Snorri's father was already dead, but his uncle Börkr inn digri (the stout) gave him fifty ounces of silver for the trip.⁶¹

Young men of limited means had no such opportunities. One spring, young Einarr was told by his father Þorbjörn that it was time for him to leave the farm and look for work elsewhere. Their poor farm could not support so many dependents, and so Einarr, the oldest child, was asked to leave.⁶²

Some young men with limited means became very successful after leaving home. Oddr Ófeigsson left home with only a fishing line, some tackle, and twelve ells of cloth, about 7 yards (6 meters). Through his hard work as a fisherman, he was able to save enough to buy a ferry, and then ocean-going trading ships. The success of his overseas trading voyages earned Oddr great wealth before he returned to Iceland to settle down on a farm.⁶³

Some young men became blood brothers (*fóstbræðralag*), a ceremony that established bonds as strong as blood. Þórir Hróaldsson and Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson were blood brothers.⁶⁴

The ceremony is described in *Gísla saga*. The men cut a long strip of turf, leaving the two ends attached to the ground. The turf was raised overhead and then propped up with a spear to hold turf arch overhead. The four men each went under the raised turf arch. They each drew blood and allowed it to fall onto the soil below the arch. They stirred together the blood and soil, then fell to their knees and swore oaths that each would avenge the other as if they were brothers. But in this case, as they took each other's hands to seal the agreement, Þorgrím Þorsteinsson backed out, and the others withdrew their hands as well.⁶⁵

Marriage

Marriage was a business arrangement between the family of the bride and the family of the groom. As such, the feelings or emotional attachment between prospective bride and groom did not often play a role in the decision to wed.

Although courting the woman was only natural when such feelings of attachment were aroused, the practice was frowned upon by the woman's family as unseemly. Courting might take the form of visits by the man to the woman's house, conversations with the woman, or poems of praise to the woman. Such poems of praise were prohibited by law,⁶⁶ yet plenty of examples of them have survived, which suggests that the law must have been routinely ignored.⁶⁷

An example of this kind of courting appears in *Kormáks saga*. Kormákr Ögmundarson regularly visited Steingerðr Þorkelsdóttir at Gnúpsdalr, where she was being fostered. While there, he composed poems of praise to her. When her father Þorkell learned of this, he felt that there was the prospect of dishonor to himself and his daughter, and so he brought Steingerðr home to his farm at Tunga.

Kormákr continued to visit Steingerðr at Tunga, so Þorkell hired two assassins to kill him. The assassins attacked Kormákr after he left Tunga on one of his regular visits. The assassins were incompetent, and Þorkell could see they were making no progress against Kormákr. Þorkell took up his weapons and prepared to leave the house to assist them.

Steingerðr saw what her father was up to and wanted to stop him. Saying nothing, she merely took his hands in hers.⁶⁸ Þorkell made no further efforts to help the assassins, and Kormákr killed them both.⁶⁹

A man looking for a bride sought the advice of family members before taking the first steps towards a proposal, since a misstep could be costly. If a marriage proposal did not immediately follow courting, the woman's family was insulted. If a marriage proposal were rejected, the man's family was similarly injured. In either case, blood vengeance was likely.

The proposal was initiated by the male suitor or his father and approved by the woman's father, or if unavailable, her brother. The woman's family could not initiate a proposal.⁷⁰ Generally, the two prospective partners were from families with similar status and wealth, although differences in status could be made up by wealth.⁷¹ In many cases, marriages were arranged to build an alliance between families. The marriage was the means by which the families' wealth was distributed amongst the next generation.

Marriages had two parts: the betrothal and the wedding. The betrothal was a commercial contract between the woman's guardian, usually her father, and the suitor or his representative, usually his father. The proposal was made to the woman's guardian, usually by a representative of the suitor.

Whether the woman's consent was sought or not is unclear. Some sources

say that the prospective bride was not a part of the contract negotiations,⁷² and that her opinion played no role in the arrangement of the marriage.⁷³

In the sagas, there are many examples of the bride-to-be's passive acceptance of the proposal. When Kjartan Ólafsson asked for the hand of Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir, her father and brother responded favorably, and Hrefna did not refuse. She asked her father to make the decision.⁷⁴

In some cases, a woman was angered by arrangements made without her consent. Þorvaldr and his father Ósvifr arranged with Höskuldr Dala-Kollsson for the marriage of his daughter Hallgerðr langbrókar (long legs) to Þorvaldr. Höskuldr did not consult with his daughter because he had already made up his mind to marry her off. When Hallgerðr learned of the arrangement, she was not pleased. "You do not love me as much as you have said, since you did not think it worthwhile to consult with me on this."⁷⁵ Regardless, the marriage took place.

In other cases the woman was consulted, and her wishes were observed. On behalf of his son Óláfr pái, Höskuldr Dala-Kollsson asked Egill Skalla-Grímsson for the hand of his daughter, Þorgerðr. He broached the topic with Egill at the Alþing meeting, but Egill demurred, saying that he must discuss the matter with his daughter.

Þorgerðr wouldn't hear of such a union, saying, "I have heard you say you love me best of all your children, but now I think you don't mean it, if you want me to marry a concubine's son."⁷⁶

Egill tried to convince his daughter of Óláfr's noble family and his fine accomplishments, but Þorgerðr was not convinced. The next day, Egill told Höskuldr of the outcome of the discussion. When Óláfr heard the news, he was angered by the humiliation. He put on his finest clothes, and taking up his best weapons, he returned to Egill's booth with his father. Egill welcomed them, and Óláfr sat down next to Þorgerðr. They began talking and spent all day in conversation.

The marriage proposal was raised anew, but this time, Þorgerðr deferred to her father. The proposal was accepted and the betrothal took place at once.⁷⁷

The betrothal involved the groom's family promising to pay a sum called *mundr* (bride price) to obtain the woman. The bride's father declared his right to give his daughter away and promised to pay a *heimanfylgja* (dowry) at the wedding. The two parties shook hands in front of witnesses to fix the bargain, and arranged a date, usually within a year. Thus, the betrothal differed little from any other commercial transaction: there was an agreed-upon price, a handshake, and witnesses.

The wedding was an elaborate festivity, with feasting and drinking going on for several days. It usually took place at the house of the bride's parents. The marriage was considered binding when at least six witnesses saw the couple openly go to bed together.⁷⁸

One has the sense that women probably married early,⁷⁹ but the sagas don't

often give the ages of brides. Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir was fifteen years old when she was first married.⁸⁰

Once married, the husband and wife were expected to live together and to work together on their farm and to start a family.⁸¹ If the marriage didn't work out, divorce could be easily obtained by either party for a wide variety of reasons. For example, if no children resulted from the marriage, the union could simply be dissolved. It was not unusual for a woman to marry several times.

Divorce was accomplished by either party by reciting a simple legal formula in front of witnesses.⁸² While the divorce might be easy, straightening out the finances between the two families could result in blood feuds that lasted for generations.

In some cases, divorce could result in severe financial burdens on the husband. Generally, the estate was split in half upon divorce, but if the husband were at fault, both the dowry and the bride-price reverted to the woman upon divorce.⁸³ A divorced man could find it extremely difficult to find the ready resources to pay these sums.

Bigamy was prohibited by law in Iceland,⁸⁴ although an Iclander could keep a wife in Iceland and one in Norway, and both sets of children had the right to inherit.⁸⁵

When Christianity was adopted in Iceland, little changed. It wasn't until after the end of the saga age that marriage changed from being a commercial contract to being a sacrament resulting in a monogamous union that could not be readily dissolved.⁸⁶

Adult Life

One study of Viking-age skeletal remains suggests that once someone reached the age of twenty years, their life expectancy was another twenty years,⁸⁷ implying that of the people who were alive at the age of twenty, half lived to reach *Maturus*, age 40 to 59 years.⁸⁸

This study of Viking-age skeletal remains is less skewed than many, since the cemetery included the remains of infants and children, which are rarely represented in Viking-age burials. However, most of the skeletal remains date from after the Viking age, and are thus don't take into account the violent deaths of young men in violent struggles that were more common in the Viking age than later.

These figures imply that marriages were often broken by the death of one spouse, which would require the remaining spouse to remarry in order to keep the farm running. Thus, the children in a family likely had diverse backgrounds and differing parents. Families rarely included a grandparent.⁸⁹

Virtually all adults were farmers, and they performed whatever other work

was necessary for the success of the farm. They engaged in political and governmental activities, in community activities, in mercantile activities. They played games and told stories and swapped news and gossip. They arranged marriages for their children, and they battled with their enemies. Adult men and women did the things that allowed their families to survive and thrive in the saga age as described in other chapters of this book.

Old Age

Skeletal remains suggest that, for at least a part of the population, long life was possible. A study of skeletal remains in Denmark dating from the end of the Viking age into the 14th century showed about 1.4 percent of the remains were from people over the age of sixty years.⁹⁰

Saga evidence also suggests that some people lived very long lives. Hrútr Herjólfsson was over eighty years old when he saw Eldgrímr try to ride away with some disputed horses that didn't belong to him. Hrútr raised his *bryntröll* (an unknown halberd-like weapon) and drove it between Eldgrímr's shoulder blades. The halberd split Eldgrímr's mail shirt, and the head of the halberd came out through Eldgrímr's chest. The elderly Hrútr gained respect as a result of the killing.⁹¹

The law code had special provisions for a man older than eighty years who married, in order to protect his existing family from any inheritance claims made by his new wife and family.⁹² For the case to have been mentioned at all in the law-code suggests that at some point in Iceland's history, an elderly man remarried and begot more children, to the distress of his children from an earlier marriage.

Hávamál teaches that the elderly should be treated with respect.

Often what the old say is good;
often from a wrinkled bag come judicious words.⁹³

That respect was not always forthcoming, according to the sagas. Helgi, a Norwegian trader in Iceland, rode past Þorgils Þórðarson, who was seventy years old. They were both riding hard, and Þorgils nearly fell off his horse as they passed. Helgi laughed at the old man and mocked him. Þorgils challenged Helgi to single combat on the spot. Helgi couldn't back down, but said that "there will be little renown beating an old fart like you."⁹⁴ Þorgils killed Helgi with one blow of his sword, and he subsequently lived to be eighty-five years old.

Old women are also mentioned in the sagas, such as Sæunn who lived at Njáll's farm at Bergþórshváll. She was very old, and Njáll's sons thought she was senile because she talked so much. Yet, much of what she said came true.⁹⁵

The fearsome Viking, warrior, and poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson also lived to be over eighty, but the saga suggests he didn't receive much respect in his

old age. He grew frail and lost his sight. On a cold day, he lay in front of the fire to warm himself. The cook chastised him, saying it was astonishing that a man as great as Egill would lie around under people's feet and prevent them from working. "Stand up and go to your bed and let us get on with our work," she said.⁹⁶

Egill mocked his infirmities in verse, and he tried to remain active despite his blindness. That summer, he wanted to ride to Alþing and start a brawl by throwing his silver hoard into the assembled crowd. He was living at Mosfell with his niece Þórdís Þórólfsdóttir and her husband Grímr Svertingsson. Grímr would not permit it, thinking Egill mad, which displeased Egill greatly.

Later in the summer, when Grímr rode away to Alþing, Egill called two of Grímr's slaves and told them to prepare a horse because he wanted to go take a bath. He mounted his horse, bringing his silver hoard with him. Egill and the two slaves disappeared across the hayfields. Egill hid his treasure, then killed the slaves. The next morning, he was found wandering aimlessly with the horse. That fall, Egill fell ill and died.⁹⁷ The silver has never been found.

The archaeological evidence suggests that long life was not typical, but that it was possible. The saga evidence suggests that for those who did reach old age were expected to be productive members of the household and certainly were not coddled.

Death

When someone died in saga-age Iceland, whether in battle, from childbirth, or from old age or disease, the body was treated in a respectful way, using ancient rituals to see the dead person on their way to whatever came next. What came next, in the minds of the heathen people in the saga age, is not easy to fathom. The literary sources and archaeological sources paint different pictures of what happened to someone after their death.

Regardless of any belief in an afterlife, the rituals observed immediately after death seem to have been consistently followed. When someone died, their eyes and nostrils were closed. If the body was not already at home, it was often brought back home and was washed and clothed and prepared for burial.⁹⁸

The dead were buried in Iceland. No archeological evidence suggests that cremation was practiced in Iceland, as it was in some other Viking lands.⁹⁹

Even for those who died a violent death away from their home, the body was buried or covered with stones. After Hrafnkell Freysgoði killed Eyvindr Bjarnason and his men, his brother, Sámr Bjarnason, came to where the bodies lay and raised burial mounds over Eyvindr and the other fallen men.¹⁰⁰

The archaeological evidence suggest that in Iceland, graves were located near the farm, but at a distance from the house: at the boundary of the property, alongside travel routes, or outside the wall of the homefield. Yet, many

known farm sites have no identifiable graves, suggesting that perhaps graves were regional, rather than local to each farm.¹⁰¹ Some graves have no identifiable farm nearby.¹⁰² Additionally, there are regions of the country in which no graves have been found.¹⁰³ It's known that people lived and presumably died in these districts, so where are the graves? One possible explanation is that different burial customs were practiced in these districts and so the graves have not yet been identified.¹⁰⁴

Of the graves that have been found in Iceland, there are striking similarities amongst the graves, and notable differences from graves found in other Viking lands. Unlike other Viking lands, there are no large mounds, no stone settings, and no cremations, all of which are commonly found in Scandinavia.¹⁰⁵

The graves found in Iceland are modest, with few grave goods, and generally built with techniques and materials that didn't require a lot of labor.¹⁰⁶ The typical grave was a shallow pit, about 20 inches (50 centimeters) deep, surrounded by stones and covered with a low mound of soil or stones.¹⁰⁷ Some mounds are circular, about 16 feet (5 meters) in diameter, while others are long mounds, 16 to 23 feet (5 to 7 meters) long and 7 to 8 feet (2 to 2.5 meters) wide.¹⁰⁸ Finds of wooden coffins or stone enclosures for the body are rare.¹⁰⁹ There were no markers or memorial stones.¹¹⁰

A few of the Icelandic burials are in wooden boats, typically 16 to 23 feet (5 to 7 meters) long. Þorgrímur Þorsteinsson was laid in a boat in Haukadalr and a mound was raised in accordance with the old customs.¹¹¹

In pagan burials in other Scandinavian lands, people were typically placed in the ground lying on their sides, usually the right side, with their legs bent and drawn up in the fetal position. Bodies usually were placed in a north-south orientation.¹¹²

In Icelandic pagan burials, the bodies are more often found lying on their backs. A north-south orientation of the body is more common, but east-west is also found.¹¹³

Heathen people were buried with grave goods in the saga age, an aspect that distinguishes pagan from Christian burials.¹¹⁴ In Iceland, the grave goods were modest, consisting of tools, utensils, and weapons: things that were used by the person when they were alive. Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson was buried with his horse, his weapons, and his blacksmith tools.¹¹⁵ Horses and riding gear are much more commonly found in Icelandic graves than in other Viking lands.¹¹⁶

The practice of burying grave goods highlights the distinction between belief in an afterlife as outlined in the literary sources and the beliefs suggested by archaeological finds. The presence of grave goods suggests that people began a journey after death. Many of the grave goods from Viking-age burials are the sorts of things one might want to take on a journey: horses, ships, food, tools, and weapons.¹¹⁷ It's possible that they were placed there to help the dead on their way to an afterlife, but some of the rich grave goods may have been placed simply to impress the neighbors.

On the other hand, the literary sources suggest for most people, there was no afterlife. People stayed in their mounds. The mythological sources say that Óðinn chose a few of the most skillful warriors after their deaths to join him at his home at Valhöll, a warrior's paradise where men spent all day fighting and all night feasting and drinking.¹¹⁸ Snorri Sturluson says that Niflhel was a place of torment for a few of the most evil of men,¹¹⁹ but the evidence suggests that Snorri applied the Christian concept of hell to the dwelling place of Hel, the Norse goddess of the underworld.¹²⁰ There's little to suggest a belief in Niflhel in pre-Christian times.¹²¹

Thus, the literary sources suggest that after their deaths, most pagan people simply sat in their mounds. After the burial of Gunnarr Hámundarson, his son Högni and Skarpheðinn Njálsson were standing near the mound in the moonlight. Suddenly, it seemed that the mound was open. They saw Gunnarr in the moonlight, with other lights illuminating the inside of the mound. Gunnarr, obviously happy, spoke a verse to the two men in a loud voice, and then the mound closed.¹²²

Þorsteinn þorskabítr (cod-biter) was away on a fishing trip when his shepherd saw the side of the holy mountain Helgafell open up. Inside were great fires and the sounds of feasting and merriment. The shepherd could hear Þorsteinn and his crew being welcomed into the mountain and given seats of honor.¹²³ The next day, news was brought of the drowning of Þorsteinn and his crew.

Occasionally, the dead were not content to sit in their grave mounds, and created trouble for the living. Special precautions were taken to guard against this possibility, which were not always successful.

Eyrbyggja saga tells of Þórólfr bægifótr (twist-foot), a violent man who was difficult to deal with. After his son Arnkell refused to help him in a dispute over some woodlands, Þórólfr went home in a rage. He sat down in his seat without saying a word. The next morning, he was found dead, and Arnkell was called.

Arnkell warned the people of the house not to pass in front of the corpse until its eyes had been shut. Arnkell got behind the corpse, covered its head, and prepared the body for burial.

In order to prevent Þórólfr's ghost from finding his way back into the house, a hole was broken in the wall behind the corpse. The body was taken out of the house through the hole, and then the hole was sealed up. This precaution made it less likely that Þórólfr's ghost would be able to find his way back into the house by retracing his path.

Þórólfr's corpse was placed on a sledge and dragged by oxen to a nearby valley where it was buried and covered with a mound.¹²⁴

Þórólfr was not content to stay in his mound. He killed livestock and then the shepherd who tended the animals. He haunted his former farm, driving people away from it. Þórólfr started haunting other farms and killing people, and eventually every farm in the valley was abandoned.



In contrast to practices in some other Viking lands, the dead in Iceland typically were buried. Most dead people were content to lie peacefully in the ground, but some became evil ghosts, terrifying and killing the living. Þórólfr bægifótr's ghost drove all the people out of the valley where his body was buried. His son disinterred the body and brought it to this spit of land, Bægifótshöfði, overlooking Álptafjörðr in west Iceland. The body was reburied here, out of sight of any farm, and a wall was built between the burial site and the mainland to keep the ghost away from any inhabited areas (author photograph).

Arnkell decided to move his father's body to a place where it could cause no more trouble. He sent word to the sons of Þorbrandr asking for assistance. The two had been on opposite sides of many arguments in the past, but the law required that everyone must help bury the dead when asked.¹²⁵

Together, they broke open the grave mound to find Þórólfr's hideous body: huge, ugly, and uncorrupted. The dragged it away on a sledge, but the first team of oxen soon were exhausted, and the second team panicked and broke loose.

The body was brought to a point of land above the shore of Álptafjörðr, out of sight of any farm. Þórólfr was buried there, and Arnkell built a high wall on the point of land between the grave and the mainland in order to keep the ghost away from any settled areas. Þórólfr rested quietly on Bægifótshöfði (Twist-foot's Headland) for the rest of Arnkell's life.¹²⁶

After Arnkell's death, Þórólfr was no longer content to stay in his mound. Once again, he began to haunt the nearby farms. Þóroddr Þorbrandsson now owned the farms in the district, and his tenants demanded that he take action.

Þóroddr and his servants broke into Þórólfr's grave mound. The body was

uncorrupted and looked more like a troll than a man. The saga says it was black as hell and had swollen to the size of an ox.¹²⁷

They levered the body out of the grave and rolled it down to the shore below. In order to dispose of the ghost, they burned the body and threw the ashes in the sea.¹²⁸

Even those precautions were insufficient. A cow licked some of the rocks where the ashes from the fire had settled. She later gave birth to a bull. When the bull was grown, it gored and killed Þóroddr and then ran into a swamp and vanished.¹²⁹

When Christianity was adopted in Iceland, burial practices changed. People were buried in consecrated ground in churchyards. Bodies were laid out on their backs, hands or arms crossed over their bodies, which were oriented east-west. Grave goods were not a part of Christian burials.¹³⁰

The difference in burial practices helps confirm the dates for the settlement and conversion of Iceland in the literary sources. Grave goods in Icelandic graves date from the middle of the 9th to the end of the 10th century. Prior to that time, there were no settlers to be buried, and after that date, they were Christian, and not buried with grave goods.¹³¹

Some families reburied their pagan ancestors in consecrated ground. *Egils saga* says that when Christianity was adopted, Þórdís Þórólfsdóttir had the bones of her uncle, Egill Skalla-Grímsson moved to the church at Mosfell.¹³²

In general, the burial practices of saga-age Icelanders resembled those practiced in the homelands of their ancestors, but the graves in Iceland are typical of fairly modest burials in Norway during the Viking age.¹³³

Farm, Food Production, and Home Life

Farm

In saga-age Iceland, everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, was a farmer. Virtually everyone lived on a farm and helped grow, harvest, gather, and catch the food needed to feed themselves. The entire extended family worked the farm and lived in the longhouse: not only husband, wife, and children, but other couples related by blood or marriage, along with farmhands, servants, and slaves.

The early settlers practiced the same kind of farming they had known in Norway and other northern lands, based on animal husbandry and grain cultivation. However, Iceland's climate was more severe, so grain cultivation was less successful than it was in Norway. After the end of the saga age, Icelanders came to rely more and more on their livestock, supplemented by fishing.¹

Typical farms took the form of a central cluster of buildings enclosed by fences and walls. The buildings were typically located on a rise or hillside, not only for good drainage, but also for visibility. It was better to be able to see visitors well before they arrived at the door of the house.

Farms typically were located near flowing water, essential for the needs of the farm. While wells were known and used throughout Scandinavia, both on farms, and in dense settlements such as trading towns,² Iceland's abundant water supplies apparently made wells unnecessary on Icelandic farms.

The main building was the longhouse, which in the early part of the saga age, was not only the residence, but also the storehouse, animal barn, and workroom. Later, as the farm prospered and grew, most of these other functions were moved to outbuildings.

Within the walls enclosing the buildings were areas used for cultivation, notably the *tún*, the homefield where the best hay was grown. Animals were kept out of these areas to protect the crops.

Cattle were the most important of the livestock. This common feature of Scandinavian culture is reflected in the language. The word for cattle is also



Saga-age farms had pasture land at higher elevations, where livestock grazed in summer. Farmhands processed dairy products in a shieling in these higher pastures. Bolli Þorleiksson's farm at Tunga had a shieling here in the Sælingsdalr valley, near the river, to take advantage of the abundant meadowland. While Bolli worked with his wife, Guðrún, at the shieling, he was attacked and killed, to avenge his having killed his foster-brother, Kjartan Ólafsson (author photograph).

the word for wealth: *fé*. Cattle were the only farm animals covered by insurance in Viking-age Iceland.³ Cattle in the Viking age were smaller than modern cattle, perhaps 49 inches (125 centimeters) high at the shoulder.⁴

Cattle were raised for multiple purposes. Milk cows provided dairy products, which were consumed fresh, but more importantly, the milk was turned into foods which could be stored over the winter months when cows stopped producing fresh milk. Fresh dairy produce was converted into products such as cheese, butter, and *skyr* for storage. *Skyr* is usually translated as *curds* in English, which fails to convey the pleasures of this delicious dairy food still produced and consumed in modern-day Iceland.

In the summer months, livestock were driven to pastures at higher elevations, called *sel* (shieling). During this time, most of the livestock were left to forage freely, while the milk cows and ewes were kept close by so they could be milked every day. The raw milk from the animals was collected and processed in a shed on site, where the farm family, or their hired hands, lived during the summer while they tended the livestock.⁵

In some cases, the *sel* was near the farm, in the same valley, but further in the valley or higher up the wall of the valley. In *Laxdæla saga*, the *sel* for Bolli

Þorleiksson's farm in the Sælingsdalr valley was both further in and higher up. While working at the sel with his wife, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and a few farmhands, Bolli was attacked and killed to avenge an earlier killing.⁶

In other the cases, the sel was some distance from the farm, perhaps in the next valley, or in the highlands between valleys. When Einarr Þorbjarnarson went searching for lost sheep in *Hrafnkels saga*, he rode from the head of the Hrafnkelsdalr valley south as far as the glacier, stopping at several shielings along the way to inquire after the lost sheep. Einarr's route was many tens of kilometers long, suggesting that the shielings were a considerable distance away from the farms back in the valley.⁷

The dairy products from the sel were brought down to the farms for storage. Liquid or semi-liquid products, such as skyr, were carried in skin sacks called *skyrkyllir*, made from the stomachs of sheep or other livestock. These products were stored at the farm in partially buried vats, which kept the food cool, helping to preserve it. Sour milk was also used as a preservative for other foodstuffs, such as meat, and was stored in similar vats.

The cattle were used in other ways on the farm, as well. Beef from the cattle was a regular part of the diet. Oxen were used as draft animals, to pull a sleigh, a sledge, or an *arðr*, an early form of plow. Additionally, bulls were used as offerings to the gods in pagan sacrifices.⁸

Bulls were not kept any longer than needed. Once sufficiently mature, young bulls serviced the herd and then were slaughtered in order to reduce the fodder required to keep the animals over the winter.⁹

Barren cattle might be grazed outdoors year round, but generally, milk-cows were brought in under cover during the winter and fed from the stored stocks of hay. During especially harsh winters, it is likely that any livestock left outdoors starved to death.¹⁰

Animal sheds and barns were built using two rows of interior posts to support the roof, creating three aisles down the length of the floor of the shed, similar to the floor plan of a longhouse. Animal stalls occupied the outer two aisles, while the central aisle was used as a passageway.

Second in importance to cattle were sheep, raised for their fleece, milk, and meat. Wethers (castrated rams) were allowed to graze, but ewes were penned and the lambs weaned from them. Smaller numbers of ewes than wethers were kept, which suggests that fleece and meat were the desired products, and that milk from sheep was of lesser importance than it came to be after the end of the saga age. Like the cattle, the sheep were driven to higher pastures in summer, where they were allowed to roam free. Because there were no natural predators in Iceland, sheep and other livestock could forage freely, without any fear that they might be attacked by wild animals. In the fall, all the farmers in a region worked together to round up the sheep and sort them by owner. In winter, some sheep may have been sheltered in barns or simple barrows.¹¹

The ratio of sheep and goats to cattle on saga-age farms can be estimated

by studying the bones found on house sites. (The counts of sheep and goat bones are often combined, since it is difficult to distinguish them based on fragmentary archaeological remains.) Early Icelandic house sites tend to have low sheep/cattle ratios, as low as 1:1 to 2:1, suggesting that sheep were much less important to early settlers than they later came to be in Iceland. The late saga-age farm at Stöng had a ratio of about 4:1, while the later farm at Aðalból in east Iceland had a ratio of about 25:1.¹²

Horses figured prominently on the Icelandic farm, not only for travel and transport, but also because their meat was prized as a common, inexpensive part of the diet. Examination of bones found at the saga-age farm at Granastaðir in north Iceland shows that the horses were slaughtered for human consumption in the same manner as cattle.¹³

In addition, horses were sacrificed to the heathen gods, and their meat was consumed as part of the feasting ceremonies. A short time after Christianity was adopted in Iceland in the year 1000, the consumption of horseflesh was banned.¹⁴

There appears to have been special interest in breeding horses in Iceland, perhaps the only farm animal to be systematically bred. Large breeding stocks were kept, with the goal of producing horses that were especially well suited for the popular sport of horse fighting.¹⁵

Other livestock included goats and pigs. Goats grazed year round in areas of brushwood. Home field pigs (*túnsvín*) were kept close to home and slaughtered for home consumption.¹⁶

Other domesticated animals were kept on saga-age farms, such as dogs. *Brennu-Njáls saga* says that Sámur was Gunnarr Hámundarson's dog at Hlíðarendi.¹⁷ Dog bones are commonly found in graves in Iceland.¹⁸ While dog bones weren't found at the Granastaðir farm site, canine bite marks on other bones strongly suggest the presence of dogs on the farm.¹⁹

The growing of hay was essential to maintain the livestock over the winter in Viking lands. Hay was required for the animals that were sheltered under cover over the winter, and hay may have been provided to livestock in pasture lands for animals that were out of doors through the winter.

As a result, it was necessary to put up sufficient hay each autumn to maintain the livestock until spring. At the beginning of the winter, the number of livestock was compared to the amount of hay in storage. If the farmer thought that insufficient hay was available, the weakest animals were slaughtered before the winter started, so that the available fodder would last the winter.

The amount of fodder required for each head of cattle over the Icelandic winter was dependent on many factors, but the best guess is on the order of 0.9 to 1.8 tons (one to two tonnes) of hay was needed,²⁰ although less would suffice in lean years. A large farm in Viking-age Iceland had as many as 20 to 30 milk cows,²¹ so harvesting and storing sufficient hay to last the winter was an arduous but important task. Studies of several saga-age farms in north Iceland sug-

gest that farms could produce between 0.22 to 0.40 tons of hay per acre (0.5 and 0.9 tonnes per hectare) on their homefields in good years.²² Presumably other hayfields would not be as productive.

These figures imply that large farms would require from 50 to 300 acres (20 to more than 100 hectares) of land set aside for hay cultivation to keep their livestock over the winter. That's a prodigious amount of land, especially since homefields were typically on the order of only a few hectares. The home field at Hofstaðir in north Iceland was about 11 acres (4.5 hectares) in the saga age.²³ Perhaps cows routinely made do with much less fodder than these rough estimates would suggest. Perhaps milk cows were allowed to graze outdoors on winter days with fair weather with little snow cover and brought in at night, reducing the amount of fodder required over the winter.

Sheep and goats, being hardier than cattle, could survive the winter out-of-doors, but might be brought under cover at the height of a storm. *Fljótsdæla sagas* says that Sveinungr Þórisson kept his sheep in his boathouse when the weather was bad.²⁴

While hay was grown on available uncultivated land, the best hay was grown in the *tún*, the homefield near the farm. Typically, two and possibly three harvests could be obtained from the homefield each season, but only one from the other hayfields.²⁵ The grass in the homefield was carefully cultivated and fertilized with manure. Animals (and people) were excluded by walls or fences so that the grass remained undisturbed while it grew during the summer.

In *Grettis saga*, when Grettir Ásmundarson rode to the farm of Auðunn Ásgeirsson to repay him for an earlier humiliation, Grettir didn't miss an opportunity to annoy Auðunn. Grettir rode into the *tún*, dismounted, and entered the farmhouse. His horse, naturally, headed for the grassiest part of the homefield and began to graze on the carefully tended grass reserved for Auðunn's prized cattle.²⁶

I carelessly walked across the *tún* on a modern Icelandic farm, trampling the grass, and I was chastised by my host. Disturbing the homefield grass remains shockingly bad manners in modern-day Iceland, as it was in the saga age.

Hay was harvested using sickles or scythes (*sigðir*). Scythes needed frequent maintenance as the work progressed. The edge was kept sharp with whetstones, typically imported from Norway, since suitable whetstones were not available in Iceland.²⁷ At regular intervals, the cutting edge of the scythe needed to be re-tempered in the forge, one of several reasons why every farm needed some form of forge, as is discussed in the next chapter.²⁸

The scythes found in Iceland are small. The longest, while not complete, has a blade of only 11 inches (27 centimeters)²⁹, suggesting that mowing even a modest size field must have taken a tremendous amount of labor.

After mowing, the hay was raked and turned and stacked against the hay-stack wall (*stakkgarðr*) for drying. It was a race against time; several consecu-

tive days of fine weather were required, or the hay could be ruined.³⁰ Hay was stored under cover in barns and storehouses, tied into bundles and stacked.

A lengthy description of the hay stores in Sveinungr Þórisson's barn occurs in *Fljótsdæla saga*. Sveinungr was hiding Gunnarr Þiðrandabani in the hay as Droplaug's sons searched for him. After loading in the hay in the fall, Sveinungr had sealed the windows of the barn with dung, which had frozen solid during the winter. While Droplaug's sons were breaking open the seals to allow light into the barn, Sveinungr pushed Gunnarr onto a haystack further into the barn and wrapped him in dry hay. Once the windows were open, it was clear there were no hiding places in the barn. Sveinungr invited the searchers to break open the hay bundles to examine them more closely, but they declined.³¹

As much hay as possible was stored under cover in barns and storehouses, but it's likely that at least some of the hay had to be stored outdoors over the winter. This hay was built into stacks and protected against the weather by turf piled around and over the stacks.³²

In order to keep animals out of the hayfields, gated walls were built of sod and stone. The walls both enclosed and protected the hayfields, and served to mark boundaries.

Building and maintaining the walls surrounding the meadows and the homefield was a major chore on the farm every year.³³ The law code specified the construction of walls, stating that they must be five feet (*fet*) thick at the bottom, three feet thick at the top, and come to the shoulder-height of a man (about 60 inches, or 150 centimeters).³⁴ The law specified that three months of the year be set aside for wall construction and maintenance: two at the beginning of the summer, and one at the end.³⁵

Hay was so important to saga-age farms that growing sufficient hay was written into the law, which required that tenant farmers hire enough farm hands that all hay meadows could be worked. The law prohibited land from becoming waste through lack of attention.³⁶

All available manure was spread on the home field to fertilize the soil and to maximize the crop. In the spring, the manure that had accumulated in the animal huts over the winter was spread on the homefield using rakes and forks.³⁷

There is evidence in the law books that some fields were irrigated in Iceland.³⁸ Laws existed to control how water was diverted and how conflicts over water rights were to be resolved. If irrigation happened at all in the saga age, however, it must have been on a small scale, due to the difficulty of digging extensive irrigation ditches with the tools available at the time.

Tools available included spades, shovels, rakes, manure forks, and hoes.³⁹ Tools were made entirely from wood, other than a thin iron cutting edge. An assortment of farm tools was found in the Oseberg ship burial in Norway.⁴⁰ Their appearance gives the impression that digging a hole was not an easy task in the saga age.

As in other Viking lands, grains were the chief crop cultivated in saga-age



Since iron was difficult to make in the saga age, most farm tools were made of wood, with a thin iron cutting edge as needed. The replica spade and shovel shown in the photograph are based on examples found throughout the Viking lands (author photograph).

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Oat pollen has been also been identified in layers dating from just after the settlement in Iceland,⁴⁶ so oat cultivation was also possible, but it seems unlikely that rye or wheat could be cultivated.⁴⁷

Smaller grain fields were worked with hand tools, while larger fields were plowed with an ox-drawn *arðr*, an early form of plow. The iron cutting piece of the *arðr* lacked flaring sides, so it merely cut grooves into the soil, rather than turning the soil like a modern plow. The iron cutting blades of *arðs* have been found in Iceland and other Viking lands, but no complete wooden framework is known to have survived. As a result, their appearance is open to speculation. It is believed that one man guided the *arðr*, while another man walked

Iceland, probably in the form of the usual northern cereal grains: barley, oats, and possibly rye. In addition, Icelanders grew some utility crops, such as flax for linen.⁴¹

In the past, it was thought that Iceland's climate must have made grain cultivation difficult even in good years, perhaps with somewhat better results in the warmer south and southeast parts of the country.⁴² Some sagas set in southern Iceland refer to grain cultivation. For example, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Höskuldr Hvítanesagoði went out from his farm at Ossabær one morning with his seed bag in one hand and his sword in the other to sow grain in his field.⁴³

More recent research suggests that grain cultivation was widespread during the saga age.⁴⁴ Barley grains have been found in a storage chest with a capacity for over 440 pounds (200 kilograms) of grain at the farm recently excavated at Aðalstræti 14–16 in Reykjavík.⁴⁵ Barley pollen has been identified in soil layers in Iceland corresponding to the saga age.

alongside the oxen, guiding them, encouraging them, and holding them when the arðr was stopped by a stone.⁴⁸

Continuous cropping was the cultivation practice most widely followed, where fields were continuously used year after year without any fallow periods. This practice required heavy fertilization in the form of manure. It is possible that alternating fields were left fallow for a year, and livestock were kept overnight on the fallow fields as a way of fertilizing the field for the next year's crop.⁴⁹

The resources of the farm comprised much more than the buildings and hayfields. Other valuable resources connected with the farm included: woodlands, meadowlands, communal pastures shared with other farms, driftage rights on the coast, fishing banks along the coast and in fjords, eider duck nesting grounds, salmon and trout fishing sites on rivers and lakes, fowling rights, egg-taking rights on bird nesting sites, and hot springs. The presence of any of these resources increased the value of the farm, as well as the prosperity and quality of life of the farm family.

Egils saga tells of Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson, an early settler who claimed a large tract of land in the Mýrar district in west Iceland. Skalla-Grímr had many farms built on his lands and set his men in charge of the farms to take advantage of the extensive natural resources on his land. His men raised livestock and sheep on their farms and in the highlands. They collected driftwood and built boats used for fishing, for catching seals, and for collecting wildfowl eggs along the shore. They took advantage of beached whales. They caught salmon in the rivers. They planted seeds. They turned wood into charcoal so Skalla-Grímr could smelt and work iron. Skalla-Grímr's wealth thus rested on many footings.⁵⁰

The law book *Grágás* has lengthy laws covering the sharing of property and other resources, along with procedures and penalties for inequitable sharing. The saga sources suggest that quarrels over shared property could quickly turn bloody. The story of a quarrel between two competing chieftains, Helgi Þorgilsson and Geitir Lýtingsson, is told in *Vápnfirðinga saga*. The quarrel escalated into a blood feud when they stepped into a dispute over a woodland shared by Þórðr and Þormóðr.⁵¹

The farm staff typically consisted of the owner of the farm, his family, as well as extended family who lived with the farmer in the longhouse. In addition, hired men and servants worked at the farm, in exchange for wages and room and board. Shepherders were hired to tend the sheep, but this work had little respect, which was reflected in their compensation. Shepherders received no wages, but only room and board. The law prohibited farmers from assigning shepherding duties to the hired men on the farm,⁵² as this reduction in status was demeaning. Many farms kept slaves, a practice that was widespread throughout the Viking lands on both large and small farms. Slaves generally worked alongside the hired workers on the farm, but probably were assigned the harder and less desirable work.

Everyone on the farm worked the farm. It's unlikely that even the greatest of chieftains sat around idle during the day. For example, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Gunnarr Hámundarson, a powerful and wealthy farmer, was sowing grain in his field when he was accidentally wounded by Otkell Skarfsson.⁵³

Regardless, there are examples of idlers in the sagas. *Gísla saga* tells of Þorkell Súrsson, who did not work the farm at Hóll that he shared with his brother Gísli.⁵⁴ Þorkell was content to lay close to the fire in the house while his brother and the other men did all the work.

The wages and duties of a farmhand are described in the law books. He is to take part in slaughtering, go on journeys with the master, spread dung in the spring, repair the homefield walls, and make one trip in the fall into the mountain highlands to round up sheep.⁵⁵

The chores assigned to a farmhand are occasionally described in the sagas, as well. In *Fljótsdæla saga*, Þorgrímr tordýfill (dung-beetle) and an unnamed farmhand were working in a hayfield, loading hay into a sledge. The young brothers Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson approached over the frozen Laugarfljót river, planning to kill Þorgrímr for his slander.

The cowardly Þorgrímr saw the boys approaching and fled. He unhitched the horse from the sledge and rode away. Helgi threw his spear, which hit its mark. Þorgrímr fell off the horse, dead.

Helgi and Grímr put the body on the back of the horse and led the animal back to the hayfield where the farmhand was working. They offered to help him with his chores, since they were responsible for increasing the amount of work he had to accomplish that day. The farmhand turned down the boy's offer, saying the loss of Þorgrímr was no source of grief. The boys left with the parting observation that Þorgrímr would probably need some help getting home.

Leaving Þorgrímr's body propped up on the back of the horse, the farmhand filled the sledge with a full load of hay. He drove the sledge back to the farm and unloaded the hay in the storehouse. He fed and watered the horse. He mucked out the cowshed and carried the manure to the hayfield. Only then did he enter the farmhouse and tell the farmer about the killing.⁵⁶

In addition to the longhouse, which served as residence, storehouse, kitchen, and workroom, typical saga-age farms had other outbuildings, including storehouses (for fodder, food, and equipment), animal shelters and barns, a smithy, and after the conversion, a church at farms belonging to wealthy or powerful farmers.

The outbuildings at the farm at Stöng in south Iceland included a smithy, cowshed, and hay storage.⁵⁷ At Granastaðir in north Iceland, a connected hall, smokehouse, and kitchen were found, along with outbuildings including a stable, a cowshed, a smithy, and several other buildings whose function could not be determined.⁵⁸

Buildings were sometimes connected, such as at Granastaðir. *Gísla saga* says that the cowshed and living quarters were connected at the farm at Sæból.

When Gísli Súrsson visited the farmhouse secretly one night to kill his brother-in-law, he entered the house through the cowshed. The door between the living space and the cowshed had been left unbolted for him, so he was able to enter and leave without being detected.⁵⁹

Moving one's residence from farm to farm was regulated in saga-age Iceland. Every person was required to have a fixed abode because in order to bring a legal charge against a person, he had to be summoned to the legal assembly (*þing*) for his region. With no fixed abode, a person couldn't be charged in the proper court. Since the law had no hold over an unattached person, they were a danger to the smooth operation of society. Thus, everyone was required to be attached to a household.

Members of the farmer's immediate family were attached to his household by default. Others were attached by agreement, such as hired hands and tenants. The law permitted one to change his legal residence on just four days each year at the end of May, called *fardagar* (moving days). During this time, hired hands and tenants made or renewed their contracts, and householders moved their residences.⁶⁰

In Iceland, each local district participated in a mutual insurance pact, called a *hreppr*. Regular annual payments from area farmers were used to help farms that suffered catastrophic losses to buildings from fire or to livestock from disease. The *hreppr* also saw to the welfare of orphans or others who could not provide for themselves, providing boarding for those who had become destitute.⁶¹

Food

There is insufficient evidence to say with certainty what saga-age Icelanders ate and how their food was prepared. While the raw materials and the cooking utensils are found in archaeological studies, the ways in which foodstuffs were combined, prepared, and presented are largely unknown. In addition, diet varied quite a bit across the Viking lands, depending on climate and available resources.

The evidence suggests that Viking-age people primarily ate agricultural products raised on their own farms: meat from cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, and goats; cereals, such as barley, rye, oats, and (rarely) wheat; dairy produce, such as milk from cows, sheep, or goats, as well as cheese, butter, and skyr; marine wildlife, such as fish and marine mammals including whales; wild birds and their eggs; vegetables, such as peas, beans, cabbage, onions, and an assortment of herbs; and wild fruits, such as apples, pears, cherries, and berries. Sugar was unknown; the only available sweetener was wild honey.⁶² To these foods would be added whatever could be hunted, captured, or gathered.

A sampling of Viking age foodstuffs were preserved in the Oseberg ship

burial in Norway. Wheat, oats, hazelnuts, and ripe apples were a part of the grave goods found on the ship.⁶³

In saga-age Iceland, all of these foods were known, but some of them were not common. The more severe climate made it harder to grow some of the crops, and hunting game was never an important source of food because of the lack of native game animals on the island.

In addition to meat and dairy products, fish were a staple part of the Icelandic diet, especially along coastal regions, and near rivers and lakes. The value of the fish increased when Christianity was adopted and fasting became routine.⁶⁴ Even to the early settlers, fertile fishing grounds were prized, as evidenced by a passage in *Landnámabók*. Þuriðr sundafyllir (sound-filler) marked out the fishing grounds at Kvíarmið and received a hornless ewe in payment from each farmer who fished there.⁶⁵ In deep waters, fish were caught with hooks and lines from small boats. On lakes and streams, fish were often caught with nets.⁶⁶

It's likely that fish was the most important food wherever there was a concentration of people, such as the annual *Alþing* assembly. Fish from Þingvallavatn, the lake immediately adjacent to the þing site, helped feed the assembled masses of people.⁶⁷

Along the coast, seals and walrus were hunted, not only for food, but also for their skin, blubber, and, in the case of walrus, for their ivory. Whales were probably not hunted, but Icelanders certainly took advantage of a whale that had drifted ashore.⁶⁸ Sea birds, water fowl, and bird eggs were also a part of the Icelandic diet, especially around the cliffs on the coast where the birds nested.

Plants, lichens, and berries were gathered where available. Iceland moss (*Cetaria islandica*), a lichen that grows on the heaths,⁶⁹ was used in place of meal in times of scarcity.⁷⁰ Other wild plants that were gathered include angelica (*Angelica archangelica*), a land plant, and dulse (*Palmaria palmata*), a red algae.⁷¹ Laws existed prohibiting the taking of dulse, angelica, or berries from another man's land without permission.⁷²

Some wild plants were consumed because of the medicinal qualities they were known to possess, such as angelica. *Fóstbræðra saga* says that Þorgeirr and Þormóðr traveled to Strandir in west Iceland to gather angelica and that they cut a large bundle.⁷³

If saga-age Icelanders grew greens and other vegetables for their own consumption, there's little evidence of it, either in the literary or archaeological records. There is good evidence for the cultivation of greens in other Viking lands.⁷⁴ Cabbage, onions, peas, and beans were grown in Scandinavia, along with herbs such as dill, parsley, thyme, and horseradish.⁷⁵ Other herbs were available from overseas traders.⁷⁶ While there's little evidence of their use in saga-age Iceland and some sources suggest Icelanders ate virtually no greens,⁷⁷ other sources suggest that vegetables were more common than the evidence to date supports.⁷⁸

One of the earliest medieval recipe books survives in a manuscript written in Icelandic found in Dublin.⁷⁹ Although it dates from well after the Viking age, it suggests that later Icelanders were aware of and used many of these spices and herbs.

Meat and fish were preserved using a variety of techniques. Meat was smoked and hung in the upper reaches of the longhouse, where smoke from cooking fires helped to keep meat from spoiling. The farm at Granastaðir in north Iceland had a hut attached to the main house which has been interpreted as a dedicated smokehouse.⁸⁰

Fish were preserved by drying. Fresh fish were sliced open and hung outdoors on wooden racks. The cold, dry winds in Iceland removed the moisture and preserved the fish before spoilage could set in.

According to several sources, salt was not commonly used for food preservation in saga-age Iceland,⁸¹ although place name evidence might suggest early settlers had an interest in salt. A number of places in Iceland have salt as part of a compound name, such as *Saltvík* (salt bay) and *Saltnes* (salt promontory). The house at Aðalstræti 14–16 had traces of salt in the longhouse, which may have been used for food preservation, but may have been used as a mordant for dyeing or for other purposes.⁸²

Another method of preservation that was widely used was to allow the food to “spoil” in a way that was safe to eat, yet prevented dangerous or pathogenic organisms from growing.

For example, whey was allowed to turn sour, a process which generated lactic acid. The lactic acid in the sour whey (*súrr*) prevented other organisms from growing. As a result, boiled meat placed into vats of sour whey didn’t spoil and remained safe to eat through the winter.

Unsalted butter was allowed to ferment during storage, creating lactic acid. Once soured, other organisms couldn’t grow, and no further degradation occurred.⁸³ Butter could be stored for extremely long periods of time in this state without refrigeration. Butter was the means by which excess dairy produce was placed into long-term storage.

When a whale washed on-shore, it created a bounteous supply of food for many farms in the district. Whale meat and blubber were stored in pits where the meat fermented.⁸⁴ In this state, it remained wholesome for long periods.

The most common method for cooking food was by boiling it, usually in iron or soapstone cauldrons hung over the fire. Iron cauldrons were constructed from a number of thin iron plates riveted together to form the pot.⁸⁵ Some cauldrons were apparently very large. *Brennu-Njáls saga* says that Sölvi was boiling meat at Alþing in a cauldron large enough that Hallbjörn inn sterki (the strong) was able to pick Sölvi up and plunge him head first into the boiling water, killing him.⁸⁶

Meat and suet was turned into sausages, which were boiled in a kettle. In

Kormáks saga, Narfi was boiling up blood sausages in the kitchen when Kormákr Ögmundarson arrived to visit Steingerðr Þorkelsdóttir. Narfi unwisely taunted Kormákr and received a whack on the head with the back of an axe, along with a couple of insulting verses for his trouble.⁸⁷

Hot stones, warmed in the fire, were used for a variety of heating and cooking tasks. Meat was sometimes prepared by boiling it in a wood-lined pit. Meat and water were placed in the pit, and hot stones were dropped in to bring the temperature up to boiling. More hot stones could be added as needed to keep the liquid hot.⁸⁸ The liquid was seasoned with whatever spices and herbs might be available.

Liquids were warmed by pouring them into a suspended animal-skin sack, and then dropping in hot stones.⁸⁹

In some households, stone ovens were used. Small stones were heated in the open cooking fire and then rolled into the oven to heat the interior for cooking food.⁹⁰ A stone oven was found at the saga-age farm at Granastaðir in north Iceland.⁹¹

Fire-warmed stones had uses not only for cooking, but also for warming and drying articles in the house, such as clothing. Fire-cracked stones are common finds at many saga-age house sites in Iceland, such as Hólmur.⁹²

Food was also prepared by roasting on iron spits, or in soapstone pots. While clay pottery was known in Viking lands, almost no broken potshards have been found, as in other parts of Europe. In Iceland, no pottery or ceramics have been found at saga-age sites.⁹³ Soapstone, wood, or iron containers must have been used exclusively.⁹⁴

Soapstone has the advantage that it can be pierced, allowing it to be suspended by iron hooks over the fire. Additionally, if broken or cracked, soapstone can be repaired with iron staples, unlike pottery. Soapstone was readily available in Norway and exported to Iceland.

Gridirons and griddles were used for frying food over an open fire, such as flatbread. Bread was typically a flat, unleavened loaf, cooked over the coals of the fire. The loaves were likely eaten warm, since they turn rock-hard when cold.

Flour was ground in stone querns. In Iceland, lava querns were used, which produced finer flour. In Iceland, however, grain was more scarce, so bread-making was less common than in other Viking lands.⁹⁵ Querns are less common finds in Iceland than in other Viking lands.⁹⁶ It is notable that no quern was found at Granastaðir, suggesting that bread-making did not occur there at all, and that grain consumption was limited.⁹⁷

Families ate two meals per day: *dagverðr* (day-meal) at mid-morning, and *náttverðr* (night-meal) in the evening. Meals were eaten in the longhouse, while sitting on the benches. It's likely that in larger houses, trestle tables were set up for meals and stored overhead on the house beams when not needed. A modest longhouse, such as Eiríksstaðir described later in this chapter, would scarcely

have had room for tables in the space between the two benches. Meals in these houses may have been taken without tables. Wealthy families used linen tablecloths.

Meats were served on wooden trenchers and eaten with one's personal knife. Forks were not commonly used. Stews, porridge, and similar items were served in wooden bowls and eaten with wooden or horn spoons. Shells were used to make ladles and spatulas. Cold beverages were consumed from wooden or horn cups or, especially for feasts, from drinking horns. Very wealthy families may have used imported glass beakers, silver cups, and other fine tableware, as have been found in other Viking lands.⁹⁸ Fragments of a fine glass drinking vessel were found at the house site at Aðalstræti 14–16 in Reykjavík.

Ale, made from malted barley, was the staple drink of all classes and all ages, although milk, mead, and fruit wines are also mentioned in the sagas.⁹⁹ Icelandic feasts could sometimes be alcoholic to excess.¹⁰⁰ *Egils saga* says that when Egill Skalla-Grímsson was just three years old, his family was invited to a feast by his maternal grandfather. Egill's father forbade him from coming "because you can't behave yourself in company when the drink is flowing—you just can't be content to stay sober."¹⁰¹

Yet *Hávamál*, an Icelandic poem of proverbial advice, suggests that one should drink with moderation:

A man shouldn't hold onto the cup, but drink mead in moderation,
it's necessary to speak or be silent;
no man will blame you for impoliteness
if you go early to bed.¹⁰²

Autumn was the season when the greatest variety of foodstuffs were available. It was the time when freshly slaughtered meat was most available, when fresh vegetables and grains were available, and when imported foodstuffs were most abundant. Feasts and celebrations were planned for the fall to take advantage of this abundance and variety.

In a recent study, the nutritive content of a hypothetical Viking-age diet was analyzed, using the foods that were available to a Viking-age farm family in Scandinavia and creating different diets for each of the four seasons of the year. The study assumed that a variety of foods were readily available, so the study is not applicable to times of famine. Additionally, some of the foods were probably not common in saga-age Iceland.

Although large quantities of food were required to meet the caloric needs of a Viking-age farmer, the analysis showed that all the key nutrients were consumed in adequate quantities. The study suggests that people living in the Viking age didn't routinely suffer from diseases due to nutritional deficiencies. Assuming they had access to a variety of foods known to be eaten during this era, they would have been able to consume the required nutrients, even during winter.¹⁰³

Archaeological evidence from saga-age Iceland confirms this conclusion. A study of 11th and 12th century skeletal remains from Skeljastaðir showed little evidence of nutritional deficiencies.¹⁰⁴

From time to time, food production could not keep up with food consumption, and famine conditions occurred. A bad summer meant that not enough hay could be brought in to feed the livestock over the winter, and the farmer was forced to slaughter more of his herd than was desirable. A bad winter meant that livestock perished when the hay ran out. While farmers could rebound from a single bad season, two such seasons in a row resulted in serious shortages. Herds, already weakened and reduced in numbers by the previous bad year, produced even less in the second bad year, resulting in widespread hunger and starvation. During these times, people turned to foods that would not normally be eaten to feed their families and their livestock.

Additionally, farmers looked to their neighbors, friends, and family members for assistance. A gift of food or fodder to a family in need could cement a family relationship or political alliance.

Brennu-Njáls saga tells of a time of great famine in Iceland, when families ran short of both hay and food. Gunnarr Hámundarson shared his supplies with anyone who asked, but eventually, he, too, ran short.

Gunnarr traveled to buy food from Otkell Skarfsson, who was well off, but Otkell refused to sell. When Gunnarr's friend Njáll Þorgeirsson heard of this, he left home and traveled to his farm at Þórólfsfell, where he loaded fifteen horses with hay and five with food. Njáll took them to Gunnarr as a gift. "I don't want you to look to anyone other than me if you're in need," he said.¹⁰⁵

Travelers always took food with them, but they preferred to stay with family, friends, or political allies along their route where meals and hospitality would be offered. If, however, they had to cross uninhabited highland routes, they had no choice but to carry sufficient food with them. The Viking-age poem of advice, *Hávamál*, teaches that when traveling, whether on mountain or fjord, one should carry plenty of food.¹⁰⁶ *Grettis saga* says that when men traveled to þing, they took provisions with them, carried in a sack over their saddle.¹⁰⁷ The kinds of foods carried while traveling probably included items like cheese, suet sausages, and dried and smoked meat and fish.

The evidence suggests that most of the time, saga-age Icelanders were able to take advantage of a range of foodstuffs to eat a balanced diet meeting their nutritional needs. It's possible that spices were available to enhance the flavor of food.¹⁰⁸ Food preservation techniques, while not appealing to the modern palate, allowed wholesome and nutritious food to be stored over the winter. When famine struck, however, hunger forced people to accept whatever might be available and to consume foodstuffs that would not normally be eaten.

House and Home

In the saga age, Iceland's population was dispersed among individual farms. The Icelandic farm centered on a turf longhouse, based on architectural styles found throughout the Viking world. Early farms in Iceland are characterized by a range of buildings and building-styles, but always include a long-house.¹⁰⁹

For poorer families, the longhouse might be the only building, shared by humans and livestock alike. This arrangement is found in early longhouses in Norway,¹¹⁰ but only recently has archaeological evidence of this living arrangement been found in Iceland, at Aðalstræti 14–16.¹¹¹ As time and resources allowed, more prosperous households added outbuildings and additional rooms to their original homes.

The saga-age Icelandic longhouse (*langhús*) was constructed with an internal wooden frame set on simple stone footings. The long turf walls of the house had a characteristic outward bulge, a feature seen throughout the Viking lands.

Inside, Viking-age houses were typically 15 to 23 feet (5 to 7 meters) wide and anywhere from 50 to 250 feet (15 to 75 meters) long, depending on the wealth and social status of the owner.¹¹² In Iceland, the house sizes tended towards the smaller end of that range, typically 13 to 20 feet (4 to 6 meters) wide and 43 to 65 feet (13 to 20 meters) long.¹¹³

In Scandinavia, walls were constructed using a variety of materials: planks, logs, stone, or wattle and daub. In places with a limited supply of wood, such as in Iceland, longhouse walls were typically built of turf, although other construction styles may have been used in Iceland.¹¹⁴ *Brennu-Njáls saga* says that Gunnarr Hámundarson's home at Hlíðarendi was made entirely of wood, clinker-built with overlapping planks, like Viking ships.¹¹⁵

In Iceland, the arriving settlers used the house building techniques that they brought with them from their homelands, such as Norway, but the scarcity of available timber forced later settlers to depend more and more either on imported timbers from Norway, or possibly on the driftwood found on Iceland's shore. Some sources suggest driftwood was not suited for house construction.¹¹⁶

Additionally, the more severe climate meant that house designs in Iceland were modified over time to make them better suited to the needs of Icelanders, who spent more time indoors in the winter than was common in Norway.¹¹⁷

The internal frame of the house consisted of two rows of wooden posts that ran down the length of the longhouse supporting the roof beams. These columns divided each interior room into three long aisles. The columns supported the roof, and, as a result, the walls carried little weight. The walls bowed out at the center of the longhouse, making it wider in the center than the ends.

The central corridor of each room had a packed dirt floor. This area was the passageway between sections of the house. On some occasions, this pas-

sageway was strewn with rushes, such as for the feast at Sæból described in *Gísla saga*.¹¹⁸ Later that evening, Gísli Súrsson used some of the rushes on the floor to extinguish the lamps burning in the hall.¹¹⁹ It's possible that woven mats may have been used to cover the dirt floor.

Fires were built on the floor, either in a fire pit running lengthwise down the center of the hall, or in individual fire circles in the rooms. The fire provided light and heat and was also used for cooking.

Some of the long fire pits were especially fine and imposing. The firepit at Aðalstræti 14–16 was much larger than required to meet the needs of the household and was well constructed, with stones set on edge to form a shape that mirrored that shape of the house.¹²⁰ Smoke holes in the roof provided ventilation and illumination, letting in light and letting out smoke.¹²¹ Covers could be dropped over the smokeholes from inside the house to keep out weather.

On either side of the central corridor, raised wooden benches (*set*) topped with wooden planks ran the length of the longhouse. The benches were deep, about 5 feet (1.5 meters), and they provided a surface for sitting, eating, working, and sleeping. Clear evidence of benches on both sides of the hall were found in the house at Eiríksstaðir,¹²² while in some houses, it appears that a bench was provided only on one side of the house, such as at Aðalstræti 14–16 in Reykjavík.¹²³ In many homes, wooden paneling, like wainscoting, was applied to the interior walls to hide the turf and to reduce the amount of moisture and dirt in the house.

If there were any windows, they took the form of small openings covered with translucent animal membranes located where the roof met the wall. Gunnarr Hámundarson's house at Hlíðarendi is described in *Brennu-Njáls saga* as having windows near the roof beams.¹²⁴

All the natural light in the longhouse came from these small windows, if they were present, and from the smoke holes overhead and open exterior doors. Additional light was provided by simple lamps. Candles were known, but were expensive and thus not commonly used. Lamps took the form of dished stones, typically soapstone, filled with fish liver oil for fuel, or, when available, seal or whale oil.¹²⁵ Cottongrass (*Eriophorum*), a common weed called *fífa* that grows in wet areas all over Iceland, was used as a wick.

Stories suggest that the lamps may have been left burning through the night. When Gísli Súrsson entered the house at Sæból at night to kill Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson, three lamps were burning, according to *Gísla saga*, although it appeared that everyone was asleep.¹²⁶

With their limited ventilation, one might think that these houses would have been smoky, dim, and murky. The saga literature suggests a dim interior. Auðunn Ásgeirsson, entering his dim longhouse from outdoors, was unable to see Grettir Ásmundarson, who was waiting for him and intentionally tripped him.¹²⁷

Yet, reconstructed longhouses are surprisingly bright during the day, even

without any artificial lights. Light entering through the smokeholes and open doors, along with light from the fire, brighten the interior. At night, or during a dark, cold day during the Icelandic winter, I suspect it would be a very different matter.

It is unlikely that the longhouses had much furniture. Only the master and mistress of the house had a secluded bed, sometimes enclosed in a bed-closet (*lokrekka*) with a lockable door. The remainder of the household slept on the benches along the sides of the longhouse, or on the dirt floor.

The surviving beds are not large, such as the bed found in the royal Oseberg ship burial in Norway. The internal dimensions of the bed are 5.5×5 feet (1.7×1.5 meters).¹²⁸

Other surviving beds and reconstructed bed-closets and benches are extremely confining, suggesting that Viking-age people may have slept sitting up in bed, with their backs against a wall, or against a partition that divided the benches into separate spaces. The bed-closet at Stöng in Iceland was about 5 feet square (1.5 meters square),¹²⁹ implying that the bed inside was considerably smaller.

An episode in *Gísli saga* provides some further information about the sleeping arrangements in a longhouse. Gísli Súrsson had visited the neighboring farm to kill Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson on a winter night. He returned home after successfully completing the task. Suspicion would have naturally fallen on Gísli, so at dawn the next morning, men from the neighboring farm came to talk to Gísli, including Gísli's brother Þorkell. Gísli and his wife, Auðr Vésteinsdóttir were in their bed-closet. Þorkell saw Gísli's shoes on the floor, covered with ice and snow, clear evidence pointing to Gísli's participation in the killing. Þorkell pushed his brother's shoes under the footboard (*fótborð*) of the bed so that no one else would see them and connect Gísli with the killing.¹³⁰

Beds were probably lined with straw. It's possible that some people used wool blankets as bed covers, or wool blankets stuffed with down. In *Gísli saga*, Gísli Súrsson asked Refr Þorsteinsson's help in hiding from pursuers. Refr hid him between the straw and covers of the bed that Refr shared with his wife Álfðís. After Refr covered Gísli over, he invited his wife Álfðís to get into bed on top of Gísli.¹³¹ When Gísli's pursuers arrived at the house, Refr encouraged them to search the room carefully for him, but Álfðís showered them with abuse and curses for disturbing her rest, which kept them from examining the bed very closely.¹³²

Very wealthy people may have had much finer bedding, as described in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Þórgunna's bedding included fine English sheets, a silken quilt, bed-curtains, and a canopy.¹³³

Some of the stories refer to sleeping quarters in the loft of the longhouse. Being dark and smoky from the open fires, it seems unlikely that anyone would want to sleep there. It is thought that one of the lofts at Eiríksstaðir was where slaves and children may have slept.

On the other hand, *Brennu-Njáls saga* says that Gunnarr Hámundarson slept in a loft above the hall at Hlíðarendi, together with his wife and his mother.¹³⁴

It's quite possible that the lower ranking members of the household, such as slaves and hired workers, slept on the bare earthen floor, particularly in houses that had a bench only on one side of the hall.¹³⁵

Tables appear to have been put up and taken down as needed. It's not clear what form those tables might have taken,¹³⁶ although it seems likely that they were trestle tables, which were stored above the beams of the house, out of the way, but readily at hand when needed.

The other likely pieces of furniture in a longhouse were wooden chests for storage and a vertical loom for weaving cloth. It's been suggested that the space under the benches was used for storage of spinning and weaving materials.

It's unlikely that chairs ever saw wide use, although examples survive from shortly after the end of the Viking age.¹³⁷ In addition, a chair was found in the royal Oseberg ship burial, with a simple box-like base, a back-rest, and seat that did not survive, but probably made from rope or bast.¹³⁸

Simple three-legged stools were more common.¹³⁹ People also used their wooden storage chests as seats.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the benches built into the house served as seats for most purposes.

The sagas often talk about the high-seat (*öndvegi* or *hásæti*), which was not a chair or a throne, as much as it was a place. It was the central part of the bench on the right (the north side) as one entered the hall, and it was the rightful seat of the owner and master of the farm. It was not necessarily any higher off the floor, only higher in honor. The guest of honor sat opposite the high-seat, on the bench across the fire.

It is unclear what physical manifestation the high-seat took. Settlers brought their high-seat pillars (*öndvegissúlur*) with them to Iceland, wooden pillars with religious significance that flanked the high-seat.

An episode in *Brennu-Njáls saga* suggests the high-seat may have had more substance. After Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði was killed by Njáll's sons, Flosi Þórðarson visited Höskuldr's widow, Hildigunnr Starkaðardóttir, who was his niece. Hildigunnr told the women to prepare the house for Flosi's visit by cleaning up, putting up wall hangings, and setting up a high-seat. When Flosi arrived, he sat down and cast the high-seat away, thinking he was being mocked.¹⁴¹ It's been suggested from this episode that the high-seat involved some sort of raised platform.¹⁴²

Houses of wealthy families probably had decorative wall hangings, or carvings, or possibly paintings.¹⁴³ The sagas tell of elaborately decorated shields hung on the walls,¹⁴⁴ tapestries hung to decorate the hall for feasts,¹⁴⁵ and paneling decorated with carved scenes from the Norse myths.¹⁴⁶ *Laxdæla saga* says that after Óláfr pái (peacock) returned from Norway, he built a fabulous new house at Hjarðarholt in west Iceland, larger and grander than had been seen

before. At a wedding feast in the new house, the poet Úlfr Uggason composed the poem *Húsdrápa* about the mythological tales illustrated by the carvings in the wood of the hall. A number of verses from the poem still survive, preserved by Snorri Sturluson in his *Snorra Edda* as examples of well-composed verse.¹⁴⁷

The sagas include considerable material detail about houses, which must be used with care. Few saga-age houses could have been intact by the time the stories were written. Houses had a lifetime of less than a century, and on a regular basis, the house had to be rebuilt. It is thought that in southern Iceland, the lifetime was typically sixty to one hundred years.¹⁴⁸ The reconstructed house at Þjóðveldisbær based on the Stöng farmhouse had to be largely rebuilt after only thirty years, suggesting that perhaps there was some detail of the reconstruction that was not quite right.

In addition, we can not be certain of the details of domestic architecture during the period in which the sagas were written. There's a gap in the archaeological record between early 12th century (the end of the saga-age) and mid 14th century (when many sagas were being written). The archaeological record shows that there had been significant changes in Icelandic house design during this period. The early 12th century farm at Stöng is well rooted in Viking era houses, while the 14th century farm at Gröf has many of the characteristics of the central passage farmhouses that continued to be built in Iceland into the 19th century.¹⁴⁹

As a result, when a saga describes features in a house, it can be difficult to determine if the author is describing features typical of the saga age, or features more typical of a later period, contemporary with the writing of the sagas.

The remains of a number of houses from saga-age Iceland have been studied. Two have been reconstructed. These modern reconstructions, although speculative in some details, provide a visitor with a sense of life in a saga-age house better than any dry report, and so I focus on those two houses.

Stöng was a large, wealthy farm in Þjórsárdalur, a fertile valley until it was covered with ash during a volcanic eruption of Hekla in 1104. The ash protected the structure of the house, so it was better preserved, with more physical evidence extant, than any previously excavated Viking era longhouse. Þjóðveldisbær is a reconstruction of the house at Stöng, built some distance away, outside of the now desolate valley.

Eiríksstaðir in Haukadalr was the farm of Eiríkr rauði (the red), who left the farm and settled in Greenland. His son, Leifr Eiríksson, led one of the voyages of exploration to Vínland and was probably born on this farm. While it was occupied, the farm was only a modest operation.

The house frame rested on stone footings. Besides forming a firm base for the house, the footings also kept the wooden structural elements of the house away from the soil, protecting them from rot. The structural support for the house was provided by wooden interior posts and beams, rather than by the

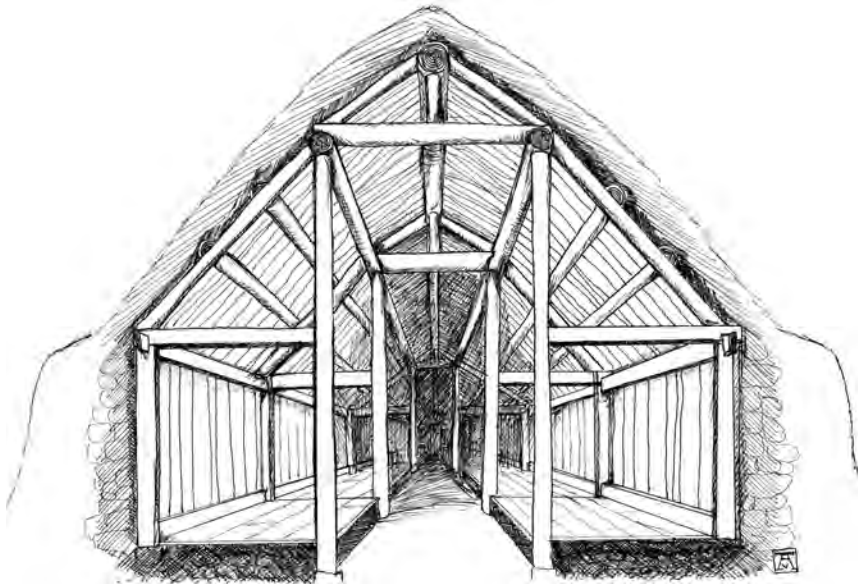


This turf house is a modern reconstruction of the saga-age longhouse at Stöng, which stood nearby in the Þjórsárdalur valley. Stöng was a wealthy farm, and the house is thought to be typical of large longhouses in saga-age Iceland (author photograph).

walls, which supported essentially no weight. The wooden beams locked together using wooden pegs and notches, rather than iron nails.

Two rows of pillars ran the length of the house, dividing the floor space into three long aisles. The pillars rested on stones set in the floor and supported two long rafter-bracing roof beams, which ran the length of the house. At each pair of pillars, the roof beams were tied together with a cross beam. Rising from the middle of the cross beam was a short pillar which supported the long roof ridge beam. The upper rafters formed a strong triangular structure with the rafter-bracing roof beams and the roof ridge beam, and the weight of the upper roof was carried by the pillars to the floor. Lower rafters carried the weight of the lower roof to another set of shorter vertical pillars set just inside the turf walls at the back of the benches. The pillars were located in the air space that separated the turf walls from the wooden paneling. The air space helped to insulate the house, and it protected the wood from dampness and rot.

The upper and lower rafters were often separate timbers which met at an angle, rather than straight-on. The angle helped resist the load of the roof, and it allowed the rafters to be made from two timbers, rather than one, long straight one. That was an important consideration in Iceland, where timber resources were limited.



The structural elements of Viking-age houses were wooden posts and beams. The posts ran in two rows down the length of the house, dividing the floor space into three long aisles. The middle aisle was used as a passageway while the side aisles were covered over with multipurpose wooden benches. The posts rose in stages from the floor to the main roof support beam. The thick turf walls supported no weight and were not structural (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).

Turf blocks called *strengir* were used for the walls, about 12 inches wide, 40 inches long and 6 inches thick (30 centimeters \times 1.0 meter \times 15 centimeters).¹⁵⁰ Long strips of turf were cut with turf knives (*torfljár*) having a scythe-like blade, and the sods of turf were peeled off the ground. Smaller turf blocks were cut with a rutter (*stungupáll*), a small spade having a spike protruding outward at the top of the blade. The spike allowed the spade to be driven into the turf with the foot.¹⁵¹

Different sizes and cuts of turf were made depending on how and where the turf was to be used. Outside walls, inside walls, and roofs each used different cuts.¹⁵² In addition, turf from different kinds of grasslands was chosen depending on the application. The best turf for walls came from boggy moors and had a thick, dense root structure.¹⁵³ Analysis shows that the best turf is about 60 percent organic material (roots and other vegetable matter) and 40 percent mineral (sand and soil from the bog). When cut, the turf was saturated with water. After cutting, the turf was set aside to allow it to dry out before being transported and used. When dry, the turf is surprisingly light and cork-like.

Typically, the turf was laid on a foundation of stone, as was done at

Eiríksstaðir.¹⁵⁴ At the farm at Granastaðir, it appears that the turf was laid directly on the earth.¹⁵⁵

During construction, two separate courses of these turf “bricks” were laid, creating a central cavity that was filled with gravel or dirt. The finished wall was about 6.5 feet (2 meters) thick, with the gravel core providing drainage. Cross-bracing turf stringers were added at regular intervals, connecting the two courses. The stringers strengthened and braced the courses of turf brick. In some cases, stone stringers may have been used.¹⁵⁶

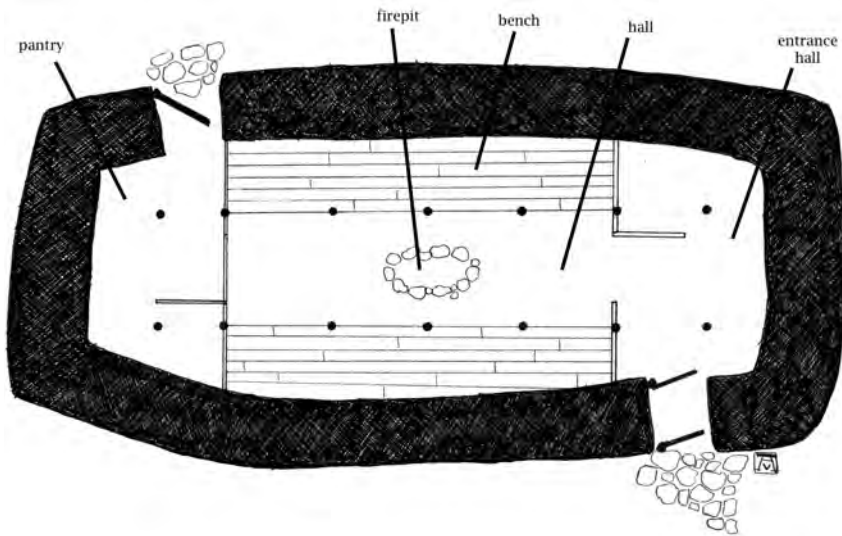
Other than the smoke holes, the only exterior use of wood in a turfhouse was the entrance and door, which were sometimes elaborately carved. The door was located under a gable. Exterior doors were typically placed near the end of the long southern wall of the house, where sunlight helped melt accumulated snow. Many houses had only one door, such as the house at Stöng, but even the modest farm house at Eiríksstaðir had a second door on the north wall at the other end of the house. The back door reduced traffic flow through the length of the hall, a significant advantage in the small, narrow hall at Eiríksstaðir, although due to the hill behind the house to the north, that door must have been frequently blocked by snow drifts in winter. The hall at Granastaðir in north Iceland had three entrances.¹⁵⁷

The area in front of the exterior doors were typically paved with flat stones, which kept the area from turning into a mud pit due to the heavy foot traffic. The house at Eiríksstaðir has two such paved areas in front of the south side of the house, strong evidence that the front door was moved from the center to the end of the house at some point while the house was occupied.¹⁵⁸

An episode in *Vatnsdæla saga* talks about several different doors in the house at Forsœludalr in north Iceland. After having suffered repeated verbal abuse from Glœðir, Þorkell krafla (scratcher) went out the workmen’s door (*verkmanna dyrr*), which was probably the northern door in the back of the house, and came back in another door, which was probably the southern door in the front. Þorkell picked up an axe, and as Glœðir walked out the south door, Þorkell followed him and struck a blow to his head. Þorkell ran back to the northern door and back into the house.¹⁵⁹

Inside, longhouses were typically divided into several rooms along their length by turf or wooden walls. At Eiríksstaðir, there were three rooms in the house. At the east end, there was a small entrance hall and storage area, with an entrance on the south side. Two doors at the entrance, one on either side of the exterior turf wall, kept out cold air and drafts. The interior wall between the entrance area and living space also had a door, which further helped to keep weather out of the main living space. At the west end was the pantry (*matbúr*), with an exterior door on the north side. The pantry was used for food storage and preparation, and wall shelves there held the utensils and gear needed for these activities.¹⁶⁰

The main hall in the middle of the house took up most of the floor area,

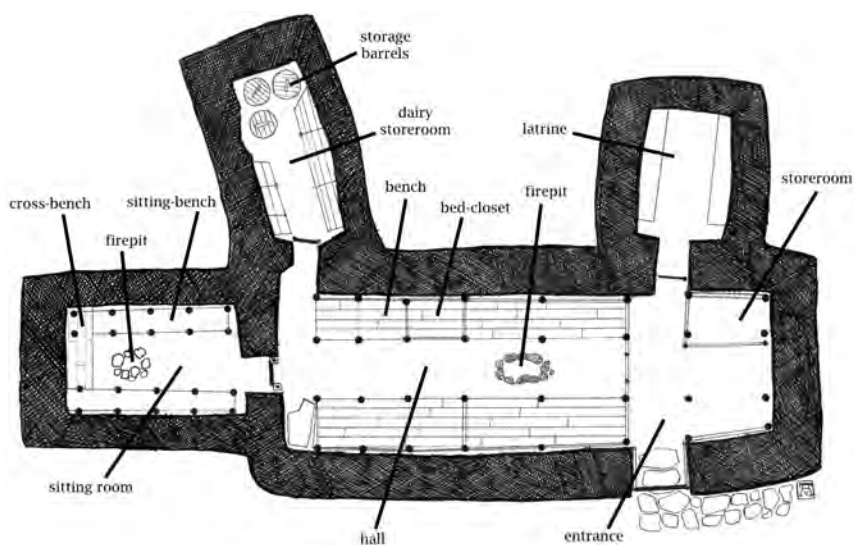


The farm at Eiríksstaðir was only a modest operation, and the longhouse was smaller than a typical house in saga-age Iceland. The interior space was divided by walls to create three rooms. The thickness of the turf walls, relative to the overall size of the house, is clearly evident in the plan (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).

with a fire pit in the middle. Benches lined either side of this room. A loft over the pantry was used for food storage, and a loft over the entrance room was used for sleeping.

The core of the wealthy longhouse at Stöng was a long hall (*skáli*) of approximately 40 feet by 20 feet (12 meters by 6 meters). This area is probably the oldest part of the complex, to which additional rooms were added over time.¹⁶¹ Built into the sides of the hall were benches that served as seating during the day and as beds at night. Daily indoor work was performed here. Food was prepared on the fire in the center of the hall, and at meal times the household sat on the benches along the sides. The hall also had a bed-closet with a lockable door, located halfway down the length of the room. The closet served as an enclosed sleeping space for the master of the farm and his wife, providing some additional protection and privacy.

At the far end of the hall, away from the main door, was a narrower room about 26 feet (8 meters) long. This room was the *stofa*, a less public space, used by women for doing their daily work, and, according to the stories, for exchanging news and gossip. At mealtimes, this area was probably used by the head of the household and his most favored guests, and the room was probably used for feasting and entertaining. The sitting benches (*bekkr*) in this room are narrower, front to back, and stand taller off the floor than the benches in the hall. They're ideal for sitting, but would serve less well for sleeping. The *pallr*, the



Top: The *skáli* was the main room of the house, and virtually all domestic activities took place within this room. The benches on either side of the hall at Eiríksstaðir were 36 inches (90 centimeter) deep and were used for sitting, sleeping, eating, working, and socializing (author photograph). *Bottom:* The house at Stöng consisted of two large multipurpose rooms, with two additional specialized rooms tacked on to the back. It's likely that the main hall (*skáli*) and entrance hall (*anddyri*) were built first and that the additional rooms were added as the farm grew and prospered (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).



The benches in the *stofa* (sitting room) were designed for sitting. They were taller and less deep than the multipurpose benches in the main hall. Trestle tables were set up and taken down as needed for the day's activities. When not in use, the tables were stored on the beams overhead. Space under the benches may have been used for storing tools and materials used for spinning, weaving, and sewing (author photograph).

cross-bench at the far end of the room, is where women traditionally sat. *Eyrbyggja saga* describes Katla sitting on the pallr at Holt while spinning yarn.¹⁶²

Víglundar saga refers to a *saumstofa* (sewing room). One winter, Ketilríðr was depressed and slept little, spending nights in her sewing room. One wonders if that room was the same as the *stofa*.¹⁶³

Occasionally, the sagas refer to a *dyngja*, a room thought to be a work-room for women. According to *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir sat in her *dyngja* at Hlíðarendi and gossiped with some visiting beggarwomen.¹⁶⁴ It's not clear how a *dyngja* differed from a *stofa*, although some of the pit houses found at saga-age house sites in Iceland have been interpreted as being the *dyngja* for the farm.¹⁶⁵ These pit-houses are described in more detail later in this chapter.

At Stöng, two additional rooms extended off the rear of the hall. One was used for dairy storage (*búr*). Large wooden vats were located here, partially set into the earth to keep the contents cool. Additional insulation was provided by stones laid between the rafters and the roof, and others against the walls. It's likely the vats held dairy products, such as skyr, and they may have held

meat preserved in sour whey. The vats are over 4.5 feet (1.4 meters) in diameter and so could hold a substantial quantity of foodstuffs.

The other side room was the latrine (*kamarr*), which had stone trenches set in the floor. The trenches pass outside through the rear wall of the room, serving as gutters to carry wastes out of the house. It's quite possible that a simple wooden pole was set over the trenches on which people sat as they used the latrine. Upright stone slabs at either end of the trenches have a notch cut out that would serve to hold the pole at a comfortable height. This room at Stöng seems to be an enormously large structure for its purpose. It appears large enough to have permitted every member of the Stöng household to have relieved themselves simultaneously.

The latrine at Stöng may have been the last addition to the building. The stories suggest that privies would normally be in outbuildings in the saga age. *Laxdæla saga* says that during the time of the sagas, it was fashionable to have outdoor toilets some distance from the farmhouse.¹⁶⁶ This arrangement appears to have been used at Eiríksstaðir.

The disadvantages of an outdoor lavatory are illustrated in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Vigfúss Bjarnarson sent his slave Svartr to kill Snorri goði at his home at Helgafell. Vigfúss told the slave to hide in the space under the gable above the main entrance door. When Snorri went out after dinner to visit the privy, Svartr drove his weapon down from above. Unskilled as a warrior, the slave missed Snorri goði and slightly wounded Már Hallvarðsson, who had followed Snorri out. The saga author remarks that at that time, farmhouses had outdoor privies,¹⁶⁷ but it's possible by the time the Stöng farmhouse was constructed, indoor lavatories were more common.

The sagas suggest that lavatory graffiti is scarcely a recent invention; it occurred in saga-age Iceland, too. Tjörvi enn háðsami (the mocker) wanted to marry Ástriðr manvitsbrekku (wisdom-slope), but her brothers Ketill and Hrólfr wouldn't permit it. Instead, she was married to Þórir Ketilsson. Tjörvi carved the likenesses of Ástriðr and Þórir into the wall of the lavatory. Every evening when he went to the privy, he spit on the likeness of Þórir and kissed the likeness of Ástriðr.¹⁶⁸

Between the hall and the front entrance at Stöng was a partitioned entrance area about 13 feet (4 meters) long, which minimized heat loss from the front door and reduced the possibility of drafts which might cause the fire to fill the hall with smoke. The room was partitioned off from the hall by a high wall and door. This open area, called an *anddyri* (porch, or entrance hall), was the saga-age equivalent of a mudroom, where wet or dirty outer garments were removed before entering the living areas. Farm equipment and tools may have been stored in this area, as well. Clothing and other gear was dried here. According to the sagas, baths were taken in this room, although at Stöng, bathers probably went to the nearby hot springs in the valley.

A small chamber was located in one corner of the porch. It was probably

a *klefi*, a closet used for storage. It may have been used for storing food items, such as dried fish. *Eyrbyggja saga* says that ghosts haunted the closet in the house at Fróðá in west Iceland. People could hear something tearing at the dried fish in the storeroom in the house, but when they went to look, nothing could be seen. Later in the winter, when it came time to start using some of the dried fish, the pile was found to be nothing but skin. All the meat had been torn off the fish.¹⁶⁹

Most of the interior doors and passageways at Stöng are low and narrow, requiring one to bend over to pass through. The sagas tell of hidden rooms and secret passages and trap doors in some longhouses, although there is no evidence for such structures at Stöng.

In addition to the longhouse, the Stöng site had a smithy, animal sheds, a church and other outbuildings. The Stöng complex represented the upper end of saga-age residences in Iceland. Other lesser sites had similar general features, but were generally smaller and with fewer amenities.

Various estimates of the space required in the longhouse for each occupant have been advanced in the range of 65 to 100 square feet (6 to 10 square meters) per person,¹⁷⁰ a figure that would imply 6 to 9 occupants in the house at Eiríksstaðir. The saga says only that Eiríkr and his wife and some slaves lived there.¹⁷¹

Buildings smaller than a longhouse have been uncovered at other farm sites. Sunken-floor huts are found, which were half buried in the ground. These buildings would have been well insulated, due to their being below grade, and they may have been used for storing items that needed to be kept cold. They also would have been easier to build, needing less building materials, and may have been used for housing the slaves and bondsmen.¹⁷²

It's been suggested that these pit buildings might have been the first to be constructed by settlers at a new home site.¹⁷³ Such buildings would have gone up quickly, allowing families to have at least minimal shelter while the more comfortable longhouse was under construction. After moving into the longhouse, the hut might have been used for some of these other purposes, or allowed to collapse, or used as a rubbish pit, as was done at Granastaðir.¹⁷⁴

One pit house found at Granastaðir contained an oven. Other artifacts and features found within the pithouse suggest it was occupied dwelling space.¹⁷⁵ It's also been suggested that pit-houses were also used as bath houses or an Icelandic version of a sauna,¹⁷⁶ or as the women's work room (*dyngja*).¹⁷⁷

Despite the cozy picture of longhouse life painted here, the longhouse was scarcely the place for privacy. The entire extended family did everything in this space: eating, cooking, dressing, sleeping, work, and play, both day and night. Everyone must surely have known what everyone else was doing. Privacy did not exist; modesty must have been unknown.

An episode from *Grettis saga* humorously illustrates the openness of the life in the hall. An outlaw, Grettir Ásmundarson swam through the icy waters of Skagafjörðr one night from his island hideaway at Drangey to the farm at

Reykir, where he had friends. Grettir warmed himself in the hot bath by the shore, then went into the house, after everyone else had already gone to bed. The house was very warm, and during the night, Grettir's bed clothes fell off him.

The first to awake the next morning were the farmer's daughter and a servant-woman. They saw Grettir lying there, naked. The servant ran back and forth, roaring with laughter. "He's out of proportion," she said. "He's big, but small between the legs."¹⁷⁸

Grettir awoke and responded to the taunts with verse suggesting she prepare for a demonstration of his endowments. He snatched her up on to the bench, and the farmer's daughter left the hall.

The saga author says only that the servant didn't taunt Grettir again.¹⁷⁹

Health, Grooming, and Medicine

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Evidence suggests that people kept a neat appearance during the saga age. One of the few naturalistic renderings of a human face from the Viking age is an antler carving from Sigtuna in Sweden. The figure shows a man wearing a helmet, with his hair neat and trim. On his face, he wears a beard and a long moustache. We know little about the details of face and body features, but it is safe to say that Scandinavians in the Viking age had features that closely resembled modern Scandinavians today.¹⁸⁰

The average height of men in Norway in the Viking era, based on skeletal measurements, was 5 feet 9 inches (176 centimeters), with a range from 5 feet to 7 inches to 5 feet 11 inches (170 to 181 centimeters), which was taller than other Europeans during this time. The average height of women was 5 feet 3 inches (160 centimeters), with a range from 4 feet 11 inches to 5 feet 5 inches (149 to 164 centimeters).¹⁸¹

Ibn Fadlan, an Arab who in the year 921 met traders in Russia thought to be Swedes, commented that the men were tall like palm trees.¹⁸²

One significant way in which Viking-age Scandinavians differed from modern people is in their physical strength. It is likely that people in the saga age routinely had strength capabilities greater than those typical of modern people. The sagas often tell tales of exceptional strength, which is supported by several forms of archaeological evidence.

Human skeletal remains show evidence of very robust connections between the hard bone and soft tissue, consistent with physical strength. Human skeletal remains with battle injuries suggest strong blows were used to inflict the injuries.¹⁸³ The remains of animals butchered for human consumption show that animals were dismembered with cuts through the shafts of long bones and

through the thick proximal portion of the femur of both cattle and horses.¹⁸⁴ The cuts were cleanly made with axe cuts through dense bone and would have required prodigious strength, even with a sharp axe.

Taken together, the archaeological evidence suggests that when the sagas describe feats of extraordinary strength among saga-age Icelanders, the stories may not entirely be heroic exaggeration.

It is likely that virtually all men had facial hair. The stories say that men who were unable to grow a beard were mocked. For example, *Brennu-Njáls saga* tells the story of Njáll Þorgeirsson. The saga author says that he was married, with six children, and that he was wealthy and handsome, but that he had a peculiarity: he could not grow a beard.¹⁸⁵

Later in the saga, Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir asked some gossiping beggar-women what was going on at Njáll's farm at Bergþórshváll in south Iceland. The women said that Njáll's sons were preparing for battle, and that his farmhands were fertilizing the hayfield by spreading manure. Hallgerðr wondered why they didn't spread it on Njáll's chin, so his beard would grow. She gave Njáll the name "Old Beardless," and his sons "Little-Dungbeards." Sigmundur Lambason composed scandalous poetry using the new names.¹⁸⁶

Njáll's son, Skarpheðinn, repaid Sigmundur for the verses by driving his axe through Sigmundur's shoulder, forcing him to his knees, and then by splitting Sigmundur's head with two more blows.¹⁸⁷

Literary evidence suggests that women wore their hair long. When Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir met Gunnarr Hámundarson in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, she is said to have thick, fair hair that came down to her breasts.¹⁸⁸ In addition, the Icelandic lawbook *Grágás* prohibited women from wearing their hair short, one of several masculine traits that was specifically forbidden by the laws.¹⁸⁹

GROOMING

Hair washing and cutting was a function performed by women for men and seems to have usually been performed outdoors, although in *Víglundar saga*, it was performed indoors. As Víglundur Þorgrímsson prepared to leave Iceland for Norway, he asked Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir to cut and wash his hair. After the job was done, he promised her he would permit no one else to cut and wash his hair as long as she was alive.¹⁹⁰

In *Heiðarvígá saga*, Barði Guðmundarson stopped to collect Gefnar-Oddr at Bakki in north Iceland to ride to a revenge killing. When Barði arrived at the farm, he found Oddr's wife was washing his hair. Oddr's horse was saddled, and his weapons were prepared. But the final preparation for the trip was a cleansing. Barði asked Oddr's wife to finish the job properly before their departure.¹⁹¹

The Icelandic lawbook *Grágás* called for the most severe penalties for a man who made someone dirty in order to disgrace him. Similarly, pushing a man

into water or urine or food or dirt resulted in the same penalties, whatever the reason.¹⁹²

A variety of grooming aids are common archaeological finds in virtually every occupied site. They're so common that one has to conclude that they were in wide use, and they are found in both male and female graves. Grooming aids included combs, toothpicks, tweezers, and earwax scrapers. The items were made from bone, antler, or ivory. In addition, a variety of wash basins have been found at archaeological sites.¹⁹³ Surviving combs have very fine teeth, and it has been suggested that comb-making was a specialized activity in the saga age, performed by skilled craftsmen, rather than at home by individual farmers.¹⁹⁴

Evidence from both literary sources and archaeological sources shows that cleanliness, good hygiene, and regular grooming were a routine part of life in the saga age. Advice from Viking-age poetry emphasizes the need for cleanliness and regular grooming. *Reginsmál* says:

Combed and washed every thoughtful man should be
and fed in the morning;
for one cannot foresee where one will be by evening;
it is bad to rush headlong before one's fate.¹⁹⁵

Hávamál says:

Washed and fed, a man should ride to the Assembly
though he may not be very well dressed;
of his shoes and breeches no man should be ashamed
nor of his horse, though he doesn't have a good one.¹⁹⁶

Iceland is blessed with abundant geothermal resources, and hot springs exist in many parts of the land. Saga-age Icelanders built bath houses, bathing pools and other structures to take advantage of the hot water for bathing and washing.

Well after the end of the saga age, Snorri Sturluson built a bath at his farm at Reykjaholt. It's fed by water piped from separate hot and cold water springs nearby, so the temperature can be adjusted to suit. A door in the hillside behind the bath opened onto a tunnel which led back to Snorri's farmhouse.

The bath is about 13 feet (4 meters) in diameter, with stone steps leading down into the pool. There are bench seats around the periphery below the water for comfortable lounging.

Most saga-age farms made do with less elaborate hot spring baths. The hot water was collected in a natural pool or hollow, which was sometimes reshaped or formed to better hold the water. Stone cisterns were made, but in some cases, turf walls were used to hold the water.¹⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, hot springs baths drew bathers from a wide area. Shelters built at the bath served not only bathers, but also women who were washing clothes in the hot water. Bathing in the hot springs was also a social activity.



Icelanders in the saga age used hot-spring baths for washing and bathing. Few were probably as elaborate as this bath, built at Snorri Sturluson's farm at Reykholt early in the 13th century. Water from nearby hot and cold water springs feed the bath in separate channels, so the temperature can be adjusted to suit. A stone bench under the water around the periphery allows bathers to sit comfortably, submerged in soothing hot water up to their chins (author photograph).

Laxdæla saga says that when Kjartan Ólafsson was wooing Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, he timed his visits to the hot springs bath to coincide with hers.¹⁹⁸

After Grettir swam from his island hideaway Drangey across the cold waters of Skagafjörður, as told in *Grettis saga*, his first stop was at the hot bath at Reykir to warm up. He warmed himself for a long time before walking up to the farm.¹⁹⁹

Another form of bathhouse is described in *Eyrbyggja saga*, built at Hraun in west Iceland. It was an outbuilding, dug into the ground. It had a window set above a stone oven so that water could be thrown onto the oven from the outside, making the bathhouse very hot.²⁰⁰ Some longhouses had rooms which are thought to have been used as sweatrooms, an early precursor to the modern Swedish sauna.

The sagas say that at Alþing, people bathed in the Øxará river, below the bridge. In *Hrafnkels saga*, Sámr Bjarnason and his uncle Þorbjörn bathed in the river early one morning.²⁰¹ While washing, they spied Þorkell Þjóstarsson for the first time, who later agreed to help them in their dispute with Hrafnkell.

The sagas talk about other forms of baths, call *kerlaug* (tub-washing) presumably used in regions where geothermal hot springs were unavailable.

Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa says that in Norway, there was no other kind of bath.²⁰² In Naumudalr in Norway, Þórólfr and Þorsteinn, the two grown sons of Þorgnýr, concluded an agreement. Þórólfr then asked his mother to prepare a tub-bath for his brother. She took off Þorsteinn's clothes, bathed him, and cut and combed his hair.²⁰³

Tub-baths occurred in Iceland, too. After being wounded in a fight, Þórðr hreða (menace) rode to the farm at Ósland in north Iceland. The farmer, Þórhallr, was reluctant to help, but his wife, Ólof Hrolleifsdóttir, insisted. She prepared a tub-bath for Þórðr and cleaned his wounds.²⁰⁴ The sagas say nothing about the details of this kind of bath.

Vatnsdæla saga says that Glœðir, a guest at Forsæludalr, took a bath in the *anddyri* (porch) of the house,²⁰⁵ the room between the main entrance and the living space of the house.

Based on the writings of their contemporaries, one has the sense that Viking people were more concerned about their appearance and cleanliness than other Europeans of the time. A treaty negotiated in the year 907 between the Byzantine Empire and the Rus, who are thought have been Norse people from Sweden and the east Baltic area, contained most of the usual provisions one might expect: the Byzantine empire was obliged to give the Rus traders food, drink, and supplies for their ships. An unusual condition in the treaty was that Byzantium was required to provide baths for the Rus "as often as they want them."²⁰⁶

HEALTH

Studies of skeletal remains from the Viking age suggest that good health and long life were possible for at least some of the population.²⁰⁷ For example, a study of 11th and 12th century skeletal remains from the farm at Skeljastaðir in Iceland showed that the population was generally healthy,²⁰⁸ but that is not to say that life was free of disease and pestilence.

Residents of trading towns that sprang up in Viking-age Scandinavia suffered the effects of poor sanitation. Wells and latrines were side-by-side at these densely populated sites, and eggs of whipworm and maw-worm parasites found at Birka give testimony to the diarrhea, nausea, and worse that town-dwellers routinely suffered.²⁰⁹

Good health was seen as an extension of good luck. Thus, preventative medicine consisted primarily of chants and charms that would maintain one's good fortune. The eddic poetry suggests charms for the maintenance of health in daily life. *Hávamál* says:

I advise you, Loddafafnir, to take this advice,
it will be useful if you learn it,
do you good, if you have it;
where you drink ale, choose the power of earth

For earth is good against drunkenness, and fire against sickness,
oak against constipation, an ear of corn against witchcraft,
the hall against household strife, for hatred the moon should be invoked-
earthworms for a bite or sting, and runes against evil,
soil you should use against flood.²¹⁰

Runic inscriptions were used as magic charms to maintain health. *Egils saga* tells how a young woman's health was first ruined through the improper use of runes, and then restored by correct runes. Egill was visiting Þorfinnr in Vermaland, in Sweden. Þorfinnr's daughter Helga, was wasting away in bed in great pain. A young man from a nearby farm had carved runes to help her, but she only got worse. Þorfinnr asked Egill if he could help.

Egill had Helga lifted out of bed. He searched the bed and found a whalebone carved with runes. After reading the runes, he scraped them off and burned them in the fire. Then he burned the whalebone and had the bedclothes thrown out. Egill spoke a verse, which said, in part, "No one should carve runes who doesn't know what he has carved."

Egill carved some new runes. He placed them under Helga's pillow, and she was quickly restored to health.²¹¹

MEDICINE

In addition to magical arts, the medical arts were also practiced in the Viking age. Classical herbal remedies appear to have been known, along with local herbs specific to the Viking lands.

Medical treatments consisted of: lancing, cleaning wounds, anointing, bandaging, setting broken bones, the preparation of herbal remedies, and midwifery. The Icelandic law book *Grágás* says that one must hold harmless a person who bleeds or cauterizes someone for the good of their health,²¹² suggesting those techniques were known and used.

The sagas say that broken limbs that were manipulated to allow the bones to knit more satisfactorily. In *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Gunnlaugr ormstunga's ankle was twisted out of joint in a wrestling match. Later, his foot was bandaged and the joint re-set.²¹³

In *Íslendinga saga*, which takes place after the saga age, it is said that Loptr broke his leg one summer. When it was set, Loptr thought it too weak to stand on. He had the leg broken a second time and instructed how it should be set. When the leg knit a second time, Loptr was not very lame.²¹⁴

After being wounded in the neck at the battle at Vigráfjörðr in west Iceland, Þóroddr Þorbrandsson was treated by Snorri goði. As the wound healed, his head drooped to one side. Þóroddr asked Snorri goði to reopen the wound and reset his head straighter, but the surgery was unnecessary. Over time, Þóroddr's head straightened up.²¹⁵

Studies of skeletal remains from the Viking age show evidence of fractures

that have healed in ribs, and bones of the extremities, and other parts of the body.²¹⁶

Most of the population had to rely on themselves or on local people, since trained medical specialists were rare. *Eiríks saga rauða* tells of an protracted period of disease and death at Lýsufjorðr in Greenland. The sick lay in bed in the hall, while the healthy helped them prepare for death.²¹⁷

An injured person sought a healer (*læknir*) for medical assistance. *Þórðar saga hreðu* tells of a fight between Þórðr hreða (menace) and Indriði at Vatns-skarð in north Iceland. Þórðr killed all of Indriði's companions and inflicted multiple gaping wounds on Indriði. Þórðr sat down to bind his own wounds, and then he went to where Indriði was laying in a pool of blood. Þórðr asked him if he might pull through. Indriði said, "I think there is hope, if a healer sees me."²¹⁸

Þórðr put Indriði on his horse, and they rode to Engihlíð, the farm of Þorvaldr, who was known as a skilled healer. Þórðr admired Indriði's bravery, and so he asked Þorvaldr to heal him.²¹⁹ Þorvaldr gave Indriði a tub-bath (*kerlaug*) and treated his wounds. Þórðr refused Þorvaldr's offer of treatment for his own wounds and instead rode away. He arrived at the farm of Ósland late in the evening. Ólof, the wife of the farmer, was a skilled healer. She gave Þórðr a tub-bath and treated his wounds.²²⁰

Later in the saga age and afterwards, it appears that certain men chose to learn the practice of medicine. After the battle at Hlýrskógsheiði in Denmark in the year 1043, the Norwegian king Magnús inn góði realized there were not as many healers available as were needed to treat the men injured in battle. The king chose twelve men to bandage the wounds of the injured, selecting those who had the softest hands.²²¹

These men subsequently acquired reputations as healers. The group included several Icelanders, and from these men, several families of Icelandic physicians descended. Notable among them was Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, who, in the 12th century, traveled abroad to receive medical training.²²²

Skeletal remains show that at least some people lived to old age in the saga era, but they also show that degenerative joint disease was common in old age.²²³ The stories tell of other conditions due to old age, such as blindness and deafness. *Egils saga* says that when Egill was an old man, he grew frail, with stiff legs, and that both his vision and hearing failed.²²⁴ His poetic skills seem to have been unimpaired, based on the poetry he composed mocking his infirmities in old age. He was more than eighty years old.

BATTLE INJURIES AND FIRST AID

Both the saga literature and forensic studies of skeletal remains suggest that battle injuries could be horrific. The sagas tell of several types of first aid used after a fight. An example of battlefield medicine is described in *Óláfs saga helga*.

At the battle at Stiklarstaðir in Norway, Þormóðr Bersason was wounded by an arrow in his side. He broke off the shaft and supported his companions in the fight as best he could. After the battle had been lost, he left the field and entered the hut where the healer women were tending the wounded. One of the women inspected the wound and could see the iron arrow head, but could not determine its path to determine what internal organs it had struck. She gave Þormóðr a hot broth, containing leeks and onions and other herbs. If, after eating it, she could smell the broth from his wound, she would know that vital parts had been injured, and that the wound was fatal.

Þormóðr refused the broth. Instead, he directed the woman to cut into the wound to expose the iron arrow head. He grabbed hold of the arrow head with pincers and pulled it out. Seeing fatty fibers on the arrow head, Þormóðr said, "See how well the king keeps us. There is fat by the roots of my heart," and he died.²²⁵

Blood from a wound was examined to determine the extent of the injuries. After the battle at Vigráfjörðr in west Iceland, Snorri goði examined the snow where Bergþórr Þorláksson had lain after being injured in battle. Snorri picked up the bloody snow, squeezed it, and put it in his mouth. Realizing that it was blood from an internal wound, Snorri said that Bergþórr was a dead man and that there was no need to chase after him to finish the killing.²²⁶

Saga evidence suggests that some men who suffered serious wounds continued to fight and were praised for their courage. In the battle on the heath described in *Heiðarvíga saga*, Þóroddr Hermundarson cut off Þorbjörn Brúna-son's foot at the ankle. Þorbjörn continued to fight, killing Þóroddr, then turning to fight Barði Guðmundarson.

Barði said that he must be a troll, to continue to fight with his foot gone. Þorbjörn replied that one didn't need to be a troll to bear an injury well and to continue the fight for as long as possible.²²⁷

Both the saga literature and forensic studies of skeletal remains show that people survived serious battle injuries and lived to fight again after their wounds healed. During a fight in north Iceland, Þórarinn Þórisson was struck by a blow that cut through his shoulder such that his lungs fell out through the wound. Halldóra Gunnsteinsdóttir, despite being the wife of one of Þórarinn's opponents in the fight, bound his wounds and watched over him until the battle was over.²²⁸ Þórarinn was carried home where his wounds were treated, and over the summer, he recovered.

Forensic evidence confirms that at least some men in the Viking age with serious battle injuries did indeed survive. Skeletal remains show both unhealed battle injuries and healed battle injuries in the same skeleton, suggesting that the man suffered a wound, recovered, and then later fought again, receiving additional wounds that proved fatal.²²⁹

Manufacture and Trade

Crafts

Saga-age Icelanders tended to be self-sufficient to a large degree, making or growing what they needed on their farms. Yet, some items couldn't be produced on Icelandic farms. In some cases, the raw materials were unavailable in Iceland. For example, soapstone, necessary for all kinds of kitchenware and household goods, was not available in Iceland. In other cases, goods were manufactured in quantity by specialized craftsmen working in trading centers in Scandinavia, and then traded over all the Viking lands, such as some forms of jewelry used as decorative fasteners for clothing.

As a result, a vigorous system of trade developed in saga-age Iceland, both domestic, between Icelandic farmers, and foreign, with Icelanders traveling overseas to trade, and foreign traders arriving in Iceland with goods.

CLOTHING AND FABRIC

Not only did Icelanders produce virtually all of their own clothing at home, but woolen fabric was one of the country's most important trade goods. The sheep raised in Iceland's abundant grazing lands were as important for their wool as their meat and dairy products. All of the stages of clothing production, from processing the fibers, to spinning, weaving, cutting, and sewing, were done by the women of the household, and any surplus fabric they produced was equivalent to cash income for the family.

Clothing was commonly made from wool or linen. Other fabrics, such as silk, were known, but were costly and rare. It has been thought that outer garments were typically wool, while under garments were linen. More recent research suggests that linen was commonly used for outer garments as well.¹

Both fabrics began with natural fibers. Wool was made from the fibers from the coats of sheep. Fleece that had been shorn from sheep was cleaned to eliminate dirt and debris and then combed with iron toothed combs to smooth and disentangle the fibers.

Linen was made from fibers in the stem of the flax plant (*Linum*), a slen-



In the saga age, Hvítárvellir was an international market and trading center. Located where the Hvítá river empties into Borgarfjörður, the sandy shores made it possible for traders to sail their ships onto the beach, where they could be brought up on to land for the winter. The open fields provided places for traders to showcase and store their wares (author photograph).

der, erect plant that grows about 40 inches (100 centimeters) tall. Flax was cultivated throughout the Viking lands. Place name evidence and pollen samples suggest that flax was cultivated in Iceland although it seems unlikely that flax would flourish there.²

Flax was harvested before the seeds ripened. The seedpods were removed, and the stems were *retted* in shallow water, a process that caused the plant to decompose and loosen the fibers without causing the fibers to rot. The process creates very disagreeable odors.

Linen fiber was mechanically separated from the flax stems by beating the stems, using a wooden beating tool. Examples of this tool were found in the grave goods of the women buried on the Oseberg ship in Norway.³ The fibers were then combed to separate out any woody particles from the linen fibers and to align the fibers before spinning.

Whether taken from sheep or from flax, the fibers were cleaned, separated, and combed to disentangle them and to remove debris. A bundle of fibers was attached to a simple distaff, which was secured under the belt or the arm of the spinster. The spindle, a short wooden staff, was weighted by a spindle whorl, a small stone with a hole cut through the center. Fibers from the distaff were

attached to the spindle, and the spindle was set spinning and allowed to sink toward the floor. Fibers were teased out of the mass of raw material and spun together between the fingers to create thread.⁴

Spindle whorls are very common finds in Iceland and throughout the Viking lands, not only in women's graves, but as stray finds in house sites.⁵ Different sized whorls were used in creating different weight threads. Some whorls are so small that they have been misidentified as beads. The fact that spindle whorls were found at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland is convincing evidence that Norse women were present at the site as part of the Vinland exploration party.⁶ Finished thread was wound onto animal bones, or a wooden thread reel may have been used, such as the example found in the Oseberg burial.⁷

The dyeing process could be applied to the fleece, to the thread, or to the finished fabric.⁸ The dyes available to Norse weavers were limited, but many of them were bright. A variety of vegetable dyes were commonly used, resulting in a range of colors: browns, from off-white to beige through russet to dark brown; reds, from a pale red to a deep red; yellows, from pale to a brilliant gold; and blue.

Frequently, linen garments were left undyed, in part because linen is more difficult to dye. Sometimes, linen was bleached to make it whiter.⁹

The authors of the *Sagas of Icelanders* often commented on the color of clothes. Brightly colored clothing was a symbol of wealth and power, due to the additional expense of the dye stuffs and the multiple dyeing operations required to make bright colors. When Bolli Bollason returned to Iceland after service in the Varangian Guard in Byzantium, he wore only scarlet cloth or gold-embroidered silk. Women could do nothing but stare at Bolli and his finery.¹⁰

Bolli's silk was no doubt imported into Byzantium by Asian traders, making it a rare and costly fabric. The scarlet cloth required repeated dyeing operations with expensive dyes, again, a rare and costly fabric. Gold threads in the fabric only increased the cost. Bolli's finery must have been extraordinary indeed.

The wearing of black (*blár*) clothing is a frequent literary convention in the sagas, indicating that the wearer is about to kill someone. When Skarpheðinn Njálsson and his brothers left Bergþórshváll to kill Þráinn Sigfússon, Skarpheðinn wore a black jacket, carrying a shield with his axe on his shoulder.¹¹

Blár referred to a blue-black color, which was the closest to a true black that could be obtained with available dyes in the saga age. *Blár* is the color of a raven. In modern Icelandic, *blár* refers to *blue*.

Black clothing was special because it required multiple dyeing operations to create the dark color; it was difficult to make. Men wore their finest clothes when undertaking a job as important and momentous as killing another man.

Fabric was woven on a vertical warp-weighted loom. No traditional Viking-age looms are known to survive, so details are speculative. In Iceland, however, looms of this type continued to be used into the 18th century, so some information survives about the looms and their use. Throughout Europe and the rest of Scandinavia, they were replaced by horizontal looms in the 12th and 13th century.¹²

The warp-weighted loom was little more than a wooden framework that leaned against the wall of the house. It stood about head-high, which put the working area at a convenient height for the weaver standing in front of the loom. Surviving pieces of looms suggest that they were as wide as 6.5 feet (2 meters), capable of weaving material as wide as 5.4 feet (165 centimeters).¹³

The warp threads were attached to a beam at the top and tensioned down below by means of stones tied to the threads. Some of the warp threads passed through a heddle, a loop of thread tied to heddle rods, horizontal wooden rods. The heddle rods were pulled away from the frame and rested on brackets attached to the frame, which moved some of the warp threads relative to others and created a shed through which the weft thread was passed on a shuttle. After each pass of the shuttle, a wooden beater was used to push the new weft against the fabric above. Finished material was wound up on the top beam. Thus, pieces of fabric much longer than the height of the loom could be woven.¹⁴

It's been estimated that a weaver could make 1 ell per day of 2 ell wide cloth, about 20 by 40 inches (50 by 100 centimeters).¹⁵ Weaving using a vertical loom is described as being both tedious and physically demanding, requiring that the weaver walk back and forth from one end of the loom to the other with each pass of the shuttle. To make the 1 by 2 ells of fabric would have required the weaver to walk about 0.6 mile (1 kilometer) for coarse, modest



It seems likely that every farm had a loom for weaving cloth. In the saga age, looms were comprised of a vertical wooden frame which leaned against the wall of the house. Women operated the loom, laboriously creating the fabric needed for the household (author photograph).

fabric, and many times that for fine fabric. Vertical looms, however, allowed a weaver to create cloth of any required width, from wide to narrow. Thus, it was not necessary to waste cloth by weaving material wider than needed.

Few Viking-age garments have survived. Scraps of cloth have survived that tell us about the fabric and the weaves, which included tabbies, and twills, yet the details of clothing patterns remain speculative.

Clothing in Iceland followed the same pattern as clothing in other Viking lands. Men typically wore woolen outer tunics (often called a *kyrtill* in the sagas) with long sleeves and a skirt that fell to the thigh or knees. Those who could afford it wore a linen undertunic (often called a *skyrtá*) of similar cut. The tunics were pulled over the head and fastened around the waist with a belt. Buttons as we know them today were not used. A piece of bone, horn, or antler passed through a loop of thread was sometimes used to close the neck hole of a tunic. Tunic patterns were very efficient in their use of material, with little wasted fabric. They used gores to provide full freedom of motion without any pulling or chafing.

Tunic sleeves were long, and it is possible that they were quite long, worn very tight around the wrists. Some men may have had a stitch taken in their sleeves to sew them up tight

Men and women generally wore woolen outer clothing and linen underclothing. Men wore tunics with trousers. The leg wraps shown in the photograph were probably less common in Iceland than in other Viking lands. Women typically wore a shorter apron-dress over a long dress. The straps of the apron dress were fastened near the shoulders using distinctive oval brooches, often with strings of beads hung between the brooches. Both men and women wore cloaks and other outer garments for additional warmth and protection from the elements as needed (top photograph author, bottom by Andrew Frolows courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum).



around their wrists every morning. While on a voyage to Norway, Grettir Ásmundarson's sleeves were sewn up tight each morning by the steermen's young wife.¹⁶

Down below, men wore trousers of either wool or linen. Leg-windings, bands of woolen cloth wrapped around the leg, are found in East Norse lands, but not typically in Iceland. Grímr Eyjúlfsen wore leg-wraps in Iceland, and they were sufficiently worthy of note that he acquired the name *Vafspjarra-Grímr* (swathing-band Grímr).¹⁷

Some trousers may have been tight fitting, although fragments that survive from Denmark and Germany show that gores were provided for freedom of motion. *Eyrbyggja saga* says that tightly-fitting clothes were stylish in the saga age. Þóroddr Þorbrandsson was wounded in a fight. A servant tried to remove his blood-soaked trousers, tugging with all his might, but the trousers would not come off. The servant said that the Þorbrandssons must be stylish dressers, since their clothes were so tight fitting that they couldn't be taken off.¹⁸ Subsequently, Snorri goði looked more closely and discovered that the pants were pinned to Þóroddr's leg by a spearhead.

It's likely that men wore linen underdrawers (*línbrækr*), although the author *Fljótsdæla saga* says that at the time of the events in the saga, men did not wear them.¹⁹ Yet, just two chapters later, Gunnarr Þiðrandabani is described leaving his tent at night to relieve himself wearing nothing but tunic and underpants, with shoes on his feet.²⁰ At that moment, his pursuers spotted him, and Gunnarr spent the rest of the night and the following day dressed so while eluding his pursuers across the cold Icelandic landscape.

There are many examples in the sagas of men rising from sleep wearing a *skyrta* and *línbrækr*, suggesting that these linen undergarments were what was typically worn to bed.

Knitting was not known in Viking lands, so woolen socks, mittens, and other articles were made using a technique called *nálbinding*. The fabric was created by knotting woolen yarn, creating an extremely strong, virtually indestructible article of clothing.

Shoes were ankle-high turn-shoes, common throughout the Viking lands. They were made of thin leather, which was stitched inside out. Then, the finished shoe was pulled through itself to turn it the right way around. This process put the stitching on the inside of the shoe, where it was less subject to wear. Shoes were closed with a tie or a toggle.

In cold or wet weather, a woolen cloak was worn over the clothing. Cloaks were simple rectangular pieces of wool, fastened at the shoulder with a pin. Cloaks provided protection from the cold, from the wind, and to a limited degree, from the rain. Some cloaks were made with very dense, very thick wool, which would have provided extra protection. Cloaks may have been decorated with fur trim or embroidery.

Men typically wore their cloaks offset, with the right arm (the weapon arm)

unencumbered by the cloak.²¹ The pin could be as simple as a bit of bone or antler to elaborately decorated silver penannular brooches. A penannular brooch is a partial ring (similar to a horseshoe-shape) with a captive pin. The pin was forced through the fabric to secure the cloak and then passed through the opening in the ring. Twisting the ring captured both the pin and the fabric, holding the pin and the cloak in place.



Men and women fastened articles of clothing, such as cloaks, using a penannular brooch, which took the form of a broken ring with a captive pin. The pin captured the fabric, and then a quick twist of the ring secured the pin, preventing the fabric from pulling out. The photograph shows a modern reproduction brooch (author photograph).

seems to have taken some interest in the clothing of the saga characters. He says that on a cold winter day, farmhands stopped at a watering hole, warm from their walking. They lay down on the clothes they had been wearing all day to drink while wearing their shirts (*stakkr*) and breeches (*brækr*).²³

Later in the saga, more details are provided of a farmhand's working clothing:

He was wearing a gray tunic. He had fastened the flaps up on his shoulders, and the loops were hanging down at his sides and he was wearing a white work-shirt on top of that.²⁴

Neither the Icelandic text nor the English translation shed much light on the nature of the garments.

Women wore an ankle-length pleated wool or linen under-dress, and over it, a shorter-length fitted woolen apron-skirt. The front and rear panels of this overgarment were fastened at the shoulders by two distinctive oval brooches,

Caps, sometimes trimmed with fur, provided warmth and protection for the head. Caps could be made of fabric, of sheepskin, or created using the *nálbinding* technique.

In cold weather, additional clothing was probably worn. In *Fljótsdæla saga*, Sveinungr ordered a young boy at his farm to head out and gather in the sheep. The boy wanted to get his hood (*hötttr*) and gloves (*vötttr*) before leaving, but Sveinungr shamed him into leaving immediately.²² Sveinungr wanted the boy to be spotted and mistaken for Gunnarr, who was being pursued and who had been taken into Sveinungr's protection.

The working clothes of a farmhand are described by the author of *Fljótsdæla saga*, who

which are very common grave finds in women's graves. They're sometimes referred to as *tortoise-shell* brooches since their shape is reminiscent of that of a tortoise shell. Some women wore strings of beads between the two brooches, as well as textile tools, such as scissors, or a needle case.

The dress was belted at the waist. Women's graves rarely reveal any traces of belt buckles or other fastenings, suggesting that women's belts were woven fabric, rather than leather as were men's belts.²⁵

Cloaks, socks, and shoes were similar to those worn by men. Head coverings were typically worn, perhaps as simple as a knotted kerchief over the head, although elaborate head-dresses may have been worn at weddings and other special occasions. The ancient poem *Rígsþula* says that even women of the lowest class wore a head-dress.²⁶

Pictorial representations of women often show their skirts dragging behind them, suggesting that perhaps their clothing was long enough to drag on the ground. Stories in the sagas also suggest long garments for women. For several years, Gísli Súrsson had eluded his pursuers by living in the remote valley at Geirþjófsfjörðr in west Iceland. When anyone was spotted sailing into the fjord, Gísli left his wife and foster-daughter in the farmhouse and hid in one of his hideouts in the valley.

One night, Gísli had trouble sleeping. He decided to leave the farmhouse and sleep in his hideout with the two women. It was a still night with a heavy frost, and the skirts of the women dragged on the frost and left a clear trail as they walked from the farmhouse to the hideout.²⁷ That same night, Gísli's nemesis, Eyjólfur inn grái (the gray) arrived with his men, and this time, they easily found Gísli's hideout by following the trail left in the frost.

The clothing worn by Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir on the day her husband Bolli Þorleiksson was killed is described in some detail in the *Laxdæla saga*. It was a working day in the shieling for the couple, so one has the sense that these were everyday clothes.

Guðrún was wearing a long tunic, a close-fitting woven bodice and a mantle on her head. She had bound a shawl about her that was decorated in black stitching with fringes at the ends.²⁸



Pictorial representations from the Viking age, such as jewelry and picture stones, show women wearing long skirts that trail behind them. This small silver figure, probably a pendant, was found in a silver hoard at Klinta, on Öland in Sweden.

Bolli sent Guðrún away from the shieling before the fight began. She washed linen in the stream until the fight was over, then returned to the shieling. Bolli lay dead. One of the killers, Helgi Harðbeinsson, wiped Bolli's blood off his spear using Guðrún's shawl, and the other men criticized him for his cruelty.

Children's clothing probably followed the same patterns as adult clothing, cut to fit the child's smaller frame. The every-day clothing of Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson, aged twelve and ten years, is described as being plain striped rough homespun tunics, with a cloak over them, and with breeches below.²⁹

Viking-age garments were finer, better proportioned, more brightly colored, and better suited to their purpose than was typical in the later middle ages. The materials that have survived (both the fabric itself, and the stitching) are very fine, with surviving fabric samples having up to 60 threads per cm (150 threads per in).³⁰ Smoothing stones and boards are common finds in women's graves. The stones and boards were used to smooth fabric before sewing in order to make very fine seams.³¹

As with many aspects of Viking-age life, there are far more questions about clothing than there are answers. How did mothers nurse their infants? That routine task would seem very difficult, based on our current understanding of women's clothing. How did women avoid setting their long, trailing dresses and dangling apron-skirts on fire in houses where fires were routinely kindled on the floor? While the natural fibers used in the Viking age don't easily ignite, it would seem to be a significant safety issue. We do not have good answers to these and many other questions.

Besides its obvious utilitarian functions, clothing played other roles in saga-age society. Clothing could be a love token, either premarital or extra-marital. A woman's cutting out a shirt for a man was a sign of her affection for him.

Clothing was a sign of hospitality. Any family that could afford spare clothing would keep warm, dry clothing on hand for travelers and guests.

The production of cloth for everyday use was a home craft. Professional clothmaking probably did not occur in Viking lands, although professionally made cloth was imported from other lands during the saga age.

Homemade woolen cloth, called *vaðmál*, served as Iceland's standard unit of currency. The laws described how cloth was to be valued,³² with specific requirements as to how it was to be woven and measured.³³ Through standardization, third parties were not required to judge the value of the cloth for trade or payment. The value was set solely by the physical measure of the cloth. Not only was cloth exchanged within the country, but Icelanders traveling overseas carried both cloth and finished garments as trade goods.

The garments were typically in the form of a shaggy cloak (*röggvarfeldr*). Woolen fleece was woven into the fabric of the cloak at regular intervals. After the fabric was completed, the tufts of fleece were combed flat, so they com-

pletely covered the surface of the garment. The lanolin-rich fleece overlayer resulted in a very warm and water resistant cloak which was prized in other lands. As with the raw fabric, the law specified the details of the cloak's construction.³⁴

The family's weaver was an important part of the household. Not only did she create the fabric and clothing necessary for the family's use, but her excess production generated wealth for the family.

IRON PRODUCTION AND BLACKSMITHING

One of the key factors in the success of the Icelandic settlement was the ability to smelt and forge iron using locally available materials. While some iron goods were imported into Iceland, local smiths engaged in every stage of iron-working, ensuring a stable supply of tools and implements critical to a sustainable settlement. Slag and iron blooms have been recovered from Viking-age sites around the country, clear evidence of local iron production.

The main source of ore in Iceland and most Viking lands was bog iron. Streams running down from the mountains carry dissolved iron. When the stream passes through a bog, chemical and biological processes concentrate the iron ore, called bog iron. This ore could be processed in small batches in a bloomery hearth to create raw iron, ensuring Iceland a small but steady supply of locally produced iron. Because of the time-consuming processes used to create it, smelted iron was valuable. Roughly worked iron bars were used as trade goods, as well as partially forged items, such as axe-head blanks.

Raw material from the bog took the form of iron-rich nodules, which ranged from pea-sized to fist-sized. The nodules regrew after harvesting, so the same bog could be harvested again after a few decades.³⁵

The nodules were roasted in charcoal fires to drive off moisture and then smelted in furnaces that were small, clay-lined shafts made of stone set into an earth and turf matrix held in place by a wooden crib-like structure. The furnaces were about 28 inches (70 centimeters) high, and the clay lining was very thin, only 1 inch (a few centimeters) due to the scarcity of clay in Iceland.³⁶

Charcoal was the usual fuel, which was mixed with the ore and added to the top of the furnace as the smelting progressed. An air blast was supplied through the side of the furnace with a bellows which raised the temperature to 2000 to 2400°F (1100 to 1300°C) at the bottom of the furnace near the iron. The process was tended constantly, adjusting the fuel, ore, and air to optimize the results. The smelting operation lasted for many hours.

When the fire finally died, amongst the ash, slag, and charcoal in the bottom of the pit was an 18 to 22 pounds (8 to 10 kilograms) mass of raw iron, called a bloom (*blástrjárn*). By repeatedly heating and working this iron, more impurities were mechanically removed. The desired end result was a malleable low-carbon iron, ready to be forged to fabricate the required articles. Because

the smelting process was difficult to control, the quality of the iron obtained was highly variable. In addition, the process was very inefficient; a lot of iron was left in the slag wastes.

Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson, one of Iceland's first settlers, worked bog-iron on his farm at Raufarnes, rather than at his home at Borg, because the woods he needed for making charcoal were too far away from Borg. *Egils saga* says that Skalla-Grímr couldn't find a suitable rock for the anvil stone, so he brought one up from the bottom of the fjord. The stone still stands at the modern farm at Rauðanes.³⁷

Smelting was difficult, requiring large quantities of raw materials, and significant skill. It's likely that iron was smelted in Iceland only in regional bloomeries, operated by skilled smiths and located close to the necessary raw materials.

It has been suggested that Viking-age iron in Iceland was somehow inferior to iron from the other Viking lands, but that notion is not well-supported by the evidence. Throughout the Viking lands, most iron was made from bog iron. The raw materials in Iceland were no better or worse than those available in Scandinavia. The skill of the smith had more to do with the quality of the finished product, and there is nothing to suggest that smiths in Iceland were any more or less skillful than those in Scandinavia.

Iron could be worked by any local smith to produce the tools necessary to support the island's agrarian economy, as well as domestic utensils and simple weapons such as axes and spears. Knives were also made locally, but swords were imported. Even continental Scandinavians relied on sword blades manufactured in Frankish lands in present-day Germany.³⁸

The distribution of iron finds at the Viking-age house at Hólmr suggests that iron blooms were also used as cult offerings.³⁹

Every farm probably had some sort of forge, since settlements were scattered, and heavily used tools could not be kept functional without periodic rework and repair.⁴⁰ It's likely that some farms had better-equipped smithies than others, and that some farmers were better smiths than others. The sagas occasionally mention a farmer visiting a neighboring farm to use the smithy there. Þorkell Súrsson and Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson went to Þorgrímr nef's (nose) smithy, where they reforged the broken pieces of the sword Grásiða into a spear. Þorgrímr nef was both a very skilled blacksmith and a socerer.⁴¹

Several smithies from saga-age Iceland have been excavated, and numerous archeological sites have yielded smithing tools and unworked iron.⁴² The smithy at Reykholt in west Iceland was uncovered underneath the 19th century church on the site during renovations. Wood from the smithy has been dated from the mid-11th through the mid-13th centuries. The structure was approximately 6.5 × 10 feet (2 × 3 meters), of which half was devoted to fuel storage. The circular furnace was about 32 inches (80 centimeters) across. A stone-lined cistern and a long trench were probably filled with water for

quenching the workpiece. There is a hole in the floor. It is thought that the smith sat on the floor, with his feet in the hole, and worked in that position with all his tools readily within reach, an interpretation that remains controversial. No anvil stone has been found.⁴³

Both smelting and smithing required charcoal as fuel, another product of Icelandic farms. Wherever woodlands existed, trees were cut, chipped, and set afire in covered pits to produce charcoal. The stripping of forests for fuel is thought to be the greatest single factor contributing to Iceland's deforestation.⁴⁴

The iron production complex at Háls, a saga-age farm in west Iceland, has been partially excavated and studied. The evidence suggests that a massive iron production facility operated here in phases for a short time, perhaps just a few years each over a span of several decades, and only later was a farm built near the site.⁴⁵

The evidence at the site suggests that while it was in use, about 650 to 1400 pounds (300 to 650 kilograms) of iron was produced from the nearby bog. This quantity is enough iron to supply the needs of a saga-age farm for upwards of fifty years. It seems likely that the site was a production center, creating the raw iron that was used by established farms closer to the coast.⁴⁶

CARPENTRY

All the wooden items needed by the Icelandic farmer were likely to have been made at home, including houses and furniture, saddles, tools, kitchen equipment, and boats.

The Mästermyr find is a Viking-age tool chest and related artifacts found in an excellent state of preservation in Gotland, Sweden.⁴⁷ The find consists of not only the tool chest filled with tools for working in iron, wood, bronze, and precious metals, but also many pieces of work, some in progress, and some completed. The tools give us a good idea of the kinds of tools that a Viking-age farmer might have available for his use on his farm, and the kinds of jobs he might be expected to undertake. Tools included: hammers, tongs, a saw, a hacksaw, rasps and files, anvils, axes and adzes, draw-knives, and bores. Few saga-age tools have been found in Iceland, but one could reasonably expect them to be similar to those used in other Viking lands.

Large trees were not abundant in saga-age Iceland, except, perhaps, at the beginning of the settlement. *Landnámabók* says that Ávangr, one of the first settlers, was able to build an ocean-going ship from trees in the woods at Botn.⁴⁸ Some classify the story as a folk tale, yet when the settlers first arrived in Iceland, they found at least a few mature birch forests with tall, straight trees, in the range of 25 to 40 feet (8 to 10 meters) tall. These trees were suitable for house building and ship building, so the earliest settlers had wood available for large projects.⁴⁹

The birch trees that grew in to replace this old growth tended to be low,



Driftwood has always been an valuable resource in Iceland, where tall straight trees are not commonly found. Much of Iceland's driftwood originates in Siberia, and after floating across the Arctic Ocean, it accumulates on north-facing coasts in Iceland. From the saga age into the modern age, Icelanders have used driftwood to supply the wood for many of their needs. This driftwood was tossed up on the shore of Ófeigsfjörðr in west Iceland (author photograph).

stubby, multi-branched shrub-like trees, rarely reaching more than 10 feet (3 meters). These trees were unsuitable for ships or houses, except, perhaps, for rafters.

Additionally, many forests were cleared to create open space for farming. The pollen record in Iceland shows that birches retreated, replaced by grains and grasses, at about the same time as the settlement.⁵⁰

As a result, after the settlement era, wood for house building and other major projects had to be imported, typically from Norway. Farmers also used driftwood, which is abundant on many of the north facing shores in Iceland.

Óláfr pái Höskuldsson built his first house at Hjarðarholt in west Iceland from driftwood and trees that were cut in the forest.⁵¹ Later, Óláfr wanted to build a new house at Hjarðarholt. He traveled to Norway to get the best quality timber. Earl Hákon gave Óláfr wood from his forest as a gift. Óláfr constructed a new house, larger and grander than had ever been seen before.⁵²

JEWELRY AND PRECIOUS METALS

Jewelry served multiple functions in saga-age Iceland. On one hand, it was an essential part of every-day clothing. Jewelry served to fasten articles of clothing together in an age when buttons and other fasteners were unknown.

In addition, jewelry was a way to show wealth and status. According to the sagas, many people had rich, elegant pins and brooches made of precious metals.

The archaeological records in Iceland don't support the sagas. The jewelry found in graves from saga-age Iceland tends to be crudely fashioned. Rather than being made of gold or silver, pieces tend to be made of copper alloys, gilded to give the appearance of something far richer.⁵³ It seems unlikely that Icelanders created this jewelry locally. While Icelandic smiths certainly had the skill, they lacked the necessary ore, as well as the clay required for making crucibles and molds.⁵⁴

Some of the jewelry found in Iceland shows evidence of having been repaired,⁵⁵ and some of the excavated farm sites show that non-ferrous metals were worked by smiths on saga-age farms. A tiny clay crucible was found at Suðurgata 3–5 in Reykjavík.⁵⁶

While Icelandic smiths were capable of working precious metals, it seems more likely that much of the every-day jewelry was imported into Iceland. Some jewelry, notably the oval brooches worn by women, was mass produced in trading towns in Viking lands.⁵⁷ Molds are found in these trading towns,⁵⁸ and many nearly identical brooches are found. Interestingly, younger examples show a loss of detail and sharpness of line suggesting that new molds were made by taking a wax impression of an existing brooch.

Archaeological evidence shows that smiths in saga-age Iceland worked metals other than iron, including bronze and precious metals. The lack of necessary raw materials suggests that any such work was very limited in scope, although farmers would have been expected to make and repair small items as needed.

OTHER MATERIALS

Other materials were also worked by Icelanders to make the items they needed for their daily lives. Bone, horn, and antler served as the raw materials for items ranging from combs to belt buckles to drinking vessels. Soft stone, such as soapstone, was imported from Norway and carved into lamps, bowls, and cooking equipment for the kitchen. Livestock yielded plentiful supplies of leather, used for a variety of purposes, including shoes, belts, sheathes, pouches, and horse equipment.

Trade

Necessities that couldn't be produced on the farm were acquired through trade. Norse traders traveled widely throughout the known world, dealing in a wide variety of goods. The capacity of Viking-age cargo ships made it possi-

ble to trade not only in high-value luxury items such as wine, silks, and spices, but also in more bulky, everyday items such as timber and soapstone.⁵⁹

In Iceland, both domestic and international trade was well developed in the saga age. Domestically, people with an abundance of resources traded with those who lacked. Those living in iron-rich districts traded with those who were iron-poor. Those with bountiful harvests and full storehouses traded with those having shortages. Fisherman living on the coast traded dried fish with those who lived inland.

For example, in *Grettis saga*, Atli Ásmundarson rode out to Snæfellsnes in the west and returned home to Bjarg in Miðfjörðr in the north with dried fish loaded onto seven pack horses, a prodigious amount of fish for a single household.⁶⁰

Iceland also participated in overseas trade, although the country never developed a separate merchant class as did other northern lands in the saga age. Trade was carried out by Icelandic farmers themselves.

The sagas suggest that many young Icelandic men spent time in overseas voyages that included trade, as well as raiding and other military adventures, earning wealth and fame. Generally, they were overseas only for a limited time before returning home to settle down on a farm.⁶¹

One such young man was Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsson, who made three voyages overseas during the early part of the 10th century. During these voyages he participated in trading,⁶² Viking raids,⁶³ and military service to King Aðalsteinn of England.⁶⁴ Although he planned to settle down in Iceland when he returned home from his third voyage,⁶⁵ he lost his life in the year 937 fighting for the English king.⁶⁶

Foreign traders came to Iceland with timber, grain, linen, soapstone, whetstones, and luxury items.⁶⁷ Other essentials that had to be imported into Iceland were wax, tar, as well as metals such as tin, lead, and articles made from their alloys. The main export was woolen cloth, but also included farm and dairy products, such as cheese, along with furs, falcons, and sulfur.⁶⁸ It's unlikely that dried fish was an export during the saga age.⁶⁹

The majority of Iceland's trade was with Norway, but traders from Sweden, and from Norse settlements in the British Isles and the North Atlantic were also regular visitors. Direct trade with continental Europe was not common.⁷⁰

During the early part of Iceland's history, traders arriving from foreign lands were not professionals, but rather farmers engaging in a part-time activity, like their Icelandic counterparts. As trading towns grew and flourished in Scandinavian lands in the later part of the saga age, a professional trading class developed. Generally, it was Norwegian traders that traveled to Iceland.⁷¹ Rather than sending a representative, these traders traveled with their goods. Since virtually all trade was done through barter, the merchant wanted to verify personally the quality and quantity of goods received in trade.

Saga evidence suggests that when foreign traders arrived in Iceland, the chieftain or the leading man in the district set the prices for the merchandise and controlled the trade.⁷² *Hænsa-Þóris saga* says that Oddr Önnundarson was accustomed to setting the prices for people's goods because he was the leader of the district.⁷³ Similarly, when a trading ship arrived at Húnavatnsós in the north, Ingimundr inn gamli (the old), a goði in Vatnsdalr, was the first to meet the ship. It was his custom to select from the cargo the merchandise he most fancied.⁷⁴

On trading journeys, the entire crew consisted of traders. In a sense, even passengers were traders, since they paid for their passage with trade goods. Each trader was entitled to an allotment of cargo space on board ship for their goods. The traders paid the captain or the ship's owner for the cargo space. The captain received a larger space in order to take merchandise that could be traded for ship's gear, should the need arise during the voyage.⁷⁵

Eyrbyggja saga details the goods that Arnbjörn Ásbrandsson brought with him when he traveled to Norway: 360 ells (200 yards, or 180 meters) of home-spun cloth, twelve sheepskins, and food for the voyage.⁷⁶

Great care was taken to evenly divide the labor on board the ship during the voyage. Everyone on board was considered a member of the crew and was expected to help, including passengers.⁷⁷ Grettir Ásmundarson's refusal to help with ship-board duties on his first voyage to Norway infuriated the ship's company. They wanted to throw him overboard until the captain intervened.⁷⁸

The author of *Eyrbyggja saga* says that at the time of the saga, traders did not routinely have cooks on board, and that people who messed together cast lots to see who would prepare the food each day. Drinking water was kept in a cask with a lid near the mast and replenished from barrels when needed.⁷⁹

Trading voyages to or from Iceland typically sailed in one direction during the first summer, wintered over, and returned the following summer. Ships were pulled up on shore and protected over the winter. The law required all farmers in the district to help with the chore of pulling a ship on shore in the fall, and relaunching the ship in the spring.⁸⁰

The reluctance to make a round trip in a single year may have been due to the dangers of North Atlantic drift ice to thin-hulled Viking trading ships. The strakes below the waterline of both the Hedeby wreck 1 (a war ship) and wreck 3 (a cargo ship) were only about $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (2 centimeters) thick.⁸¹

In addition, the uncertainties of weather and the difficulties of travel across the North Atlantic would have made any Viking-age skipper want to wait for the most favorable conditions before attempting a crossing. In *Gísla saga*, Vésteinn Vésteinsson and Gísli Súrsson left Iceland in summer on a trading voyage but had a difficult crossing to Norway. The voyage took fifty days and ended in a shipwreck on the Norwegian coast in a winter storm.⁸²

In saga-age Iceland, many harbors were used for trade throughout the country. Ships were beached in rivers, estuaries, and in trenches.⁸³ Several sagas

say that traders came to the Hvítá river at Borgarfjörður in the west. *Egils saga* adds that it was an important trading center.⁸⁴ The flat land where the river enters the fjord at Hvítárvellir would have made a fine place to beach a ship and conduct trade.

All traders on board a ship paid a fee to the landowner where the ship was beached. In exchange, the landowner provided access to water and pasturage for the horses of the traders' customers, as well as providing storage space for goods. In addition, the captain of the ship paid a dockage fee to the landowner. During the winter, foreign traders stayed with Icelandic farmers and peddled their goods.⁸⁵

Trade was usually accomplished through barter. In all the Viking lands, silver was also used as a medium of exchange, in the form of coins, unworked silver bars, and jewelry, and its value was based solely on the weight of the silver. If the weight of a piece of jewelry was more than needed to complete a purchase, it was cut into bits to make up the correct weight for the transaction. Many Viking-age silver hoards contain pieces of *hack silver*: jewelry that had been cut up in order to complete a transaction.

The equivalent value of silver varied from place to place and time to time. In the Viking era, an ounce (*eyrir*, plural *aurar*) weighed 27 grams, nearly identical to the modern avoirdupois ounce. Eight ounces made up one mark (*mörk*).

During the early part of the Viking age, most of the silver in Viking lands arrived through Sweden from Arab lands. By the end of the 10th century these sources of silver dried up, and silver from German lands replaced it. Much of the silver arrived as payments by English and continental kings to Viking raiders.⁸⁶

Different sources give different exchange rates, but at the beginning of the 11th century, the approximate exchange rates in Iceland for refined silver were:⁸⁷

8 ounces of silver = 1 ounce of gold

8 ounces of silver = 4 milk cows

8 ounces of silver = 144 ells (80 yards or about 72 meters) of homespun woolen cloth 2 ells wide (40 inches or 1 meter)

Coins typically took the form of silver pennies (*penningr*), some minted in Viking lands, but many brought home from other lands by traders and raiders. As with other silver, a coin's value was determined by weight. Minting the silver by impressing the king's mark into the coin only served to guarantee its purity, not its weight. The actual purity varied from one king to the next. Many Viking-age silver items have nick marks, where traders cut through the surface to verify that the inside of the silver was just as pure as the outside.

At the beginning of the Viking age, silver was relatively pure, but over time, impurities were added to the silver to devalue the currency. During the reign of King Haraldr harðráði of Norway, the silver content in coins was gradually reduced from 90 percent to 33 percent.⁸⁸ When Halldórr Snorrason received his pay from the king in debased coins, he contemptuously swept the

coins into the straw on the floor, saying, “Why should I serve him any longer when I don’t even get my pay in genuine currency?”⁸⁹

As the supplies of silver became depleted in Viking-age Iceland, standard homespun woolen cloth was adopted as a medium of exchange. In the law-books, many of the payments are listed in ounce-units (*aurar*) of homespun, the equivalent value of the cloth in silver. The laws specified the quality and dimensions and measurement techniques of standard cloth in several grades, as well as the penalties for false measures.⁹⁰

Transportation and Navigation

Ships

The Viking ship made the exploration and settlement of Iceland possible, but more importantly, these ships made the country viable. Without their ships to keep open regular lines of communication across the North Atlantic, the Icelandic settlement would have been marginal at best. While Iceland was blessed with extensive natural resources, many essentials had to be imported.

Ships were an important part of society, not only as a means of transportation, but also for the prestige that they conferred on their owners and skippers. Their ships permitted the Vikings to embark on their voyages of trading, of raiding, and of exploration.

The Viking ship was perhaps the greatest technical achievement of the European early medieval period. These fast ships had the strength to survive ocean crossings while having a draft of as little as 20 inches (50 centimeters), allowing navigation in very shallow water and landing in places with no harbor or jetty.

Our knowledge of Viking-age ships comes primarily from archaeological finds. Around the beginning of the 20th century, two burial ships were found in Norway, one at Oseberg,¹ and another at Gokstad.² In the later half of the century, a number of additional ships were found, notably in the Skuldelev narrows in Denmark,³ and in Hedeby.⁴ Together, study of these remains, and experiments with reconstructions based on these remains, have given us a much clearer pictures of the Viking ships and their performance.

Two broad classes of Viking era ships are found: warships called *langskip* and cargo ships called *knörr*.

Saga-age Icelanders were primarily concerned with cargo ships. It was aboard *knörr* that Icelandic settlers, their families, their livestock, and their possessions arrived in Iceland. It was aboard *knörr* that trade goods essential for Iceland's survival traveled across the North Atlantic. It was aboard *knörr* that Icelanders went on their voyages of exploration to Greenland and Vinland.

And, it was aboard knörr that young Icelanders traveled back and forth to Scandinavia to seek fame and fortune.

It was while on these Scandinavian adventures that Icelanders had their only contact with warships, setting out on Viking raids in longships. Warships were less well-suited for crossing open ocean, and it seems unlikely that warships routinely visited saga-age Iceland.

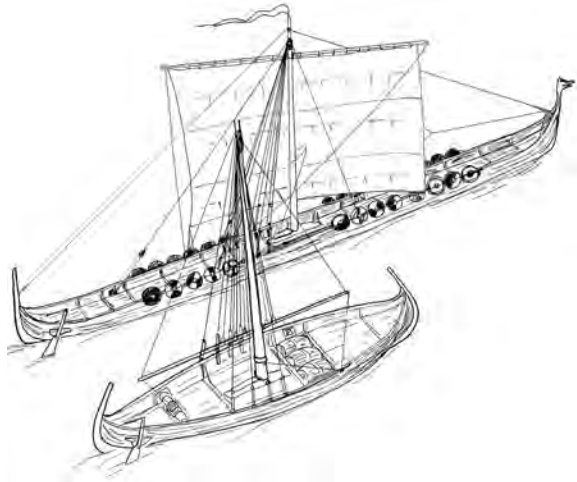
Typically, a warship was narrower, longer, and shallower than a knörr and was powered by oars, supplanted by sail. The warship was built for speed and maneuverability. In contrast, a knörr was powered primarily by sail; cargo carrying capability was the primary concern.

Two of the Skuldelev finds are warships. The smaller of the two warships is 57 feet (17.3 meters) long and 8.1 feet (2.5 meters) broad.⁵ These ships are probably typical of the kind of vessel that was used by the Vikings on their raids.

Warships were measured by the number of *rúm* (rooms). A *rúm* was the space between each crossbeam, typically located a bit less than 40 inches (1 meter) apart. Each *rúm* had space for two oars, one on each side of the ship. Thus, a 16 *rúm* ship, such as the Gokstad ship, had places for 32 rowers and was 52 feet (16 meters) long amidships, plus whatever length was needed for bow and stern. The Gokstad ship is 78 feet (23.8 meters) long, overall.⁶

Sagas tell of much larger warships, such as King Óláfr Tryggvasson's *Ormr inn langi* (*The Long Serpent*), which were much longer and carried far greater numbers of rowers than typical warships. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* says the *Ormr inn langi* had 34 *rúm*.⁷ A ship of this class would have been the king's flagship in dynastic wars, such as the battle at Svöldr, when King Óláfr of Norway battled King Sveinn tjúguskegg (forkbeard), King Óláfr, and Earl Eiríkr.

The crew's shields could be arrayed along the gunwales, tied to a shield rack outboard of the ship. This arrangement kept them out of the way, but also



Viking war ships (top) were optimized for speed. They were long and narrow and were propelled by sail or oars or both. Viking cargo ships were optimized for cargo-carrying capacity. They were propelled mainly by sail, although oars may have been used to help dock or beach the ship. The sketch compares the Hedeby-1 ship, a high-status warship, to the Hedeby-3 ship, a large-capacity cargo ship (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).



Ocean-going ships sometimes landed by sailing into an estuary at high tide. When the tide went out and the estuary emptied of water, the ship was gently deposited on the sandy bottom, allowing cargo to be unloaded with dry feet. Þorbjörn súrr (sour-milk) and his family emigrated from Norway and landed in Iceland at this estuary at Haukadals on Dýrafjörður (author photograph).

provided some slight additional protection against wind and waves. This image of the Viking ship with brightly painted shields adorning the sides is fixed in the popular imagination, as well as in picture stones and coins from the Viking era. Yet, it seems unlikely that shields were routinely displayed this way. On some surviving historical ships, the shields would have blocked the oarholes. The shield racks, to which the shields were fasten, were not robust, and probably were incapable of holding the shields securely in rough seas.⁸ In addition, modern sailors of replica ships say that shields fastened to the sides are quite impractical.

More likely, shields were deployed only for battle, or to make a ship look especially fine and imposing when approaching land. *Landnámabók* tells of Hella-Björn Herfinnsson who sailed into Bjarnarfjörður in west Iceland with his ship lined with shields. Afterwards, he was called *Skjalda-Björn* (Shield-Björn).⁹

The oars of the Gokstad ship varied in length from about 17 to 19 feet (5.3 to 5.85 meters) according to where they were used on the ship. The oarholes were all on the same strake (plank) of the hull, and thus not a uniform distance above the waterline. The length of each oar was chosen so that they all hit the water in unison.¹⁰

The oars were made of pine with a narrow blade, which makes for an efficient, lightweight oar. The oarholes were only 16 inches (40 centimeters) above the deck. Most likely, each crewman's sea chest doubled as a rowing bench. Oarholes were sealed when not in use by wooden covers that rotated in place to keep out water.¹¹

A slot cut into the oarhole allowed the blade of the oar to pass through the oarhole so oars could be deployed entirely inboard of the ship. The slot was located in a position that received minimal stress while rowing, reducing the chance for wear or damage to the strakes or to the oars from the force of the stroke.

An indelible image from Hollywood films is the Viking walking from oar to oar above the water, outboard of his ship. The saga literature suggests that the stunt was, in fact, performed. Among the accomplishments credited to King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway was his ability to walk along the oars outboard of the *Ormr inn langi* while his men rowed.¹²

Warships typically had minimal decking, with movable planks under the rowers laid on the crossbeams and small raised platforms at the bow and stern. When stopped for the night, an awning was arrayed overhead to provide some protection from the elements.

The single square rigged sail allowed sailing close to the wind. This ability, combined with the capability to row during adverse wind conditions, allowed Viking sailors to run in to shore, engage the enemy on land, and escape retribution at will.

The *Helge Ask* is a modern replica of the smaller of the two Skuldelev warships. She is based at the Roskilde Ship Museum in Denmark. They report that with a full crew of 26 at the oars, she is capable of a speed of 4 knots, but only for about 15 minutes, which is when the crew collapses from exhaustion. For longer stretches, 2 to 3 knots is probably her top speed when being rowed.

Another clue to the speed capabilities of these ships comes from linguistic studies. The term *vika sjávar* is the distance a man should work the oars before he is to be released. The unit corresponds to a two hour long turn at the oars and is thought to have corresponded to 1000 strokes.¹³ The modern term is equivalent to about 4 nautical miles. For example, *Grettis saga* says that the distance from Grettir's island hide-away Drangey to the mainland was one *vika sjávar*.¹⁴ The actual distance is about 3.5 nautical miles (6.5 kilometers). Taken together, the evidence suggests that a speed of 2 knots while rowing was typical.

Rowers were drawn from the normal crew. There was no special "underclass" of rowers. Warriors rowed. It's likely that the size of the crew was typically more than double the number of oar position so half the crew could rest while the other half rowed. One has the sense that on board ship, whether a warship or a cargo ship, everyone was called upon to do whatever job was necessary.

Large sea battles were more like land battles waged on floating islands. Large groups of ships drew together and were tied into a single mass of ships. Sails were furled, and it is possible that masts were unstepped as well.

The opposing ships approached. Missiles such as arrows and spears were shot as the ships closed and drew together. Opposing crews tried to board the outermost ships, clearing the deck using close combat, then cutting the ship loose so that the next ship could be attacked. Small boats swarmed around the battle to kill any combatants who tried to save themselves by jumping overboard.¹⁵

A war ship was a valuable item, not only for her prestige and monetary value, but also for her utility in future battles. As a result, the intent in naval combat was to gain control of the ship, and any valuables she might be carrying, while minimizing any damage to the ship. This goal was achieved not by attacking the ship, but rather by attaching the ship's crew. The attackers attempted to sweep the decks free of the enemy without damaging the ship or her gear, and thus gain control of the ship.

The shallow draft of Viking war ships had several advantages. Vikings could raid well inland by sailing far up rivers that were too shallow for typical sea-going vessels of the day. The Franks were shocked by Viking raids far inland on rivers not thought to be navigable. The shallow draft of their ships allowed Vikings to set up impregnable bases deep within enemy territory. Viking ships could land anywhere there was a shelving beach; no harbor was necessary.

Other European ships of the time required much deeper waters and were incapable of landing in such places. Viking raiders routinely landed on harborless islands, safe from attack by their enemies who were unable to land.

Archaeological evidence supports the view that ships were beached regularly. For example, the Skuldelev ships have wear on their keels consistent with repeated sand and gravel landings.¹⁶

In addition, the shallow draft made for fast and easy disembarkation during a raid. When the ship was beached, a Viking could be certain that if he jumped overboard near the stem, the water would scarcely be over his knees. The crew could leave the ship and join the raid quickly and confidently.

Under more normal conditions, conventional methods of boarding the ship were probably used. A gangplank was found next to the Gokstad ship.¹⁷

The ships that were more commonly used in saga-age Iceland were cargo ships. One of the three 11th century knörr found in the Skuldelev narrows in Denmark was a coastal trader about 46 feet (14.0 meters) long, 11 feet (3.3 meters) broad, with a draft of 36 inches (90 centimeters). The loading capacity is approximately 5.0 tons (4.5 tonnes).¹⁸ A larger ocean-going trader found at Skuldelev was 52.5 feet (16.0 meters) long and 15.7 feet (4.8 meters) broad with a draft of 50 inches (1.28 meters). However, she could carry many times the cargo of the coastal trader: 28 tons (25 tonnes), with a hold 6 feet (1.8 meters) long forward of the mast and 11 feet (3.5 meters) aft.¹⁹ With a capaci-

ity this large, it is likely that she carried not only luxury goods, but also everyday objects in bulk quantities for trade. It's estimated that this ship's "effective" speed in regular ocean traffic was on the order of 3 to 6 knots.

Greater speed may have been possible under good conditions. The saga literature suggests that the crossing from Norway to Iceland, a distance a bit less than 1000 nautical miles, was normally accomplished in a fortnight or so, but extraordinary crossings were accomplished in less than a week. *Landnámabók* says that the voyage from Staðr in Norway to Horn in eastern Iceland takes seven days.²⁰ Under adverse conditions, voyages could take much longer. *Gísla saga* says that Þorbjörn súrr's voyage from Norway out to Iceland took more than sixty days.²¹

The knörr had half decks both fore and aft, each with a few oar-holes. Oars were probably only used for maneuvering in preparation for landing or for departing. Oars may have been used to help turn the ship when tacking.²² More wear on some oar holes relative to others suggests that some ships were less capable turning in one direction than the other.

A big open hole amidships comprised the cargo hold. Brushwood mats or straw under the cargo protected the ship from damage due to the cargo.

The minimum crew size was five men.²³ A crew of about six manned the coastal trader: a helmsman, a lookout, a bailer, and others sufficient to handle the sail. The ocean-going knörr probably had a crew of twelve who shared the profits, though any discussion of crew size on these ships is speculative. Trading ships had only a few oarholes, giving little indication of the number of men required. Additionally, everyone on board, passengers, traders, and crew alike, were pressed into service in times of difficult sailing.

Like the warships, the shallow draft of the cargo ships meant that they could easily be run up onto a beach for unloading, which was probably the usual way to land a ship.

Bárðar saga Snæfellsás tells how one such sandy beach got its name in west Iceland. After Bárðr Dumbsson beached his ship here, his men relieved themselves in the bay. The excrement washed up on the beach, so the bay was called *Dritvík* (Shit Bay).²⁴

Ships were also sailed into shallow estuaries (ós) at high tide for loading and unloading. As the tide ran out, the ship was gently deposited on the bed of the estuary, where the cargo could be easily unloaded. *Gísla saga Súrssonar* says that Þorbjörn súrr and his family arrived in Iceland and landed at Haukadalsós, the estuary in the Haukadalr valley, where they made their home.²⁵ The sand and gravel on the bed of the estuary would have comfortably held the ship's keel, allowing her to have been unloaded with dry feet.

Iceland had no trading towns, so all landings were made on a shelving beach, or in an estuary. In other Viking lands, trading towns grew. The towns of Hedeby, Birka, and Kaupang show evidence of harbors with jetties for docking a ship. The ships themselves, however, give evidence that piers were not

routinely used. Many ships have outboard gear, such as cleats and oarlocks, that would have been easily damaged by a pier.²⁶

On the other hand, coiled withy fenders have been found in Hedeby, suggesting that ships were protected from rubbing against each other or against a pier.²⁷ Additionally, wood scraps from the harbor areas suggest that these outboard parts were broken and replaced on a regular basis.

Some ships were well protected against rubbing, such as the Skuldelev I ship, which appears to have had a robust rubbing stringer along the entire length of the ship.²⁸

In some trading towns, small boats may have been used to ferry cargo from ships anchored in the harbor to land. Harbors such as Hedeby show evidence of wooden poles in the harbor to which ships could be tied. Wagons may have been driven into shallow water alongside the ship for unloading. Some Scandinavian harbors show evidence of stones laid from the beach into the water to facilitate driving a wagon into the water.²⁹

Voyages must have been very difficult for passengers and crew. The ships were completely open, and everyone was exposed to the elements. People slept wherever they could, probably between the crossbraces. Travelers used a *húð-fat* (leather sleep sack) in which to sleep at night and to store their belongings during the day. Food was probably dried, salted, or smoked meat and fish. Beverages consisted of water, ale, or sour milk in tubs. *Eyrbyggja saga* says that drinking water was kept in barrels on board ship.³⁰

Not surprisingly, ships and lives were routinely lost during ocean crossings. *Landnámabók* says that of the twenty-five ships that set out one summer from Iceland carrying settlers to Greenland, only fourteen arrived.

Smaller cargo ships were used on rivers, notably on trading voyages in Russia. Saga-age Icelanders probably had little exposure to these kind of voyages, although some young Icelanders traveled to Byzantium for service in the Varangian Guard. These men would have made the difficult journey over Russia's rivers to Byzantium onboard these ships.

These ships had larger crews and more oars so as to be able to travel up river. These ships could be portaged when needed. Cargo ships were routinely carried overland as Viking traders traveled from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea on their regular Asian and Arabian trade routes. The route is described in some detail in *De administrando imperio*, a Greek work written by the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos around the year 944. The portage around one of the rapids was "six miles."³¹ The ships were dragged or carried on the shoulders, in some cases by slaves in chains, while other crew members guarded against bandits who lay in wait to take advantage of the traders during this difficult portage.

It's not clear if Iceland had a ship building tradition in the saga age. Literary evidence suggests that some early settlers built ships after they arrived in Iceland. Ávangr, the first settler at the farm at Botn, built an ocean-going ship from the great woods around his farm.³²

While the first settlers found tall straight trees, suitable for houses and ships, the trees that replaced this old growth were short and stubby and were poorly suited for ships.³³ A major obstacle for a ship-builder in Iceland was where to get the wood.

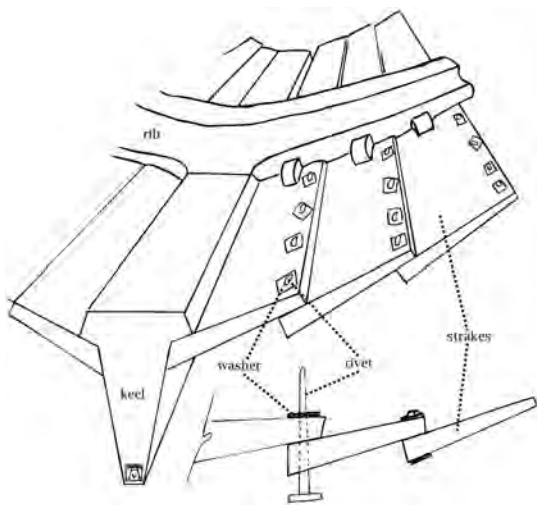
Evidence of ship parts in Greenland suggests that Greenlanders were building ships during this time, perhaps from wood obtained in Vinland.³⁴ Saga-age Icelanders occasionally brought back wood from Norway to build their houses, but it would hardly make sense to bring back wood for a ship. Surely, it would have made more sense simply to build the ship in Norway and sail the finished ship back home to Iceland.

Viking ships were built using the *clinker* technique, in which the lower edge of each hull strake (plank) overlapped the upper edge of the one below. Strakes were riveted together using iron rivets. Rivets were typically about 3 inches (75 millimeters) long. The total weight of rivets and washers used in the construction of a typical ship was about 330 pounds (150 kilograms), a very substantial and expensive amount of iron in the saga age.³⁵ The Hedeby 1 longship used about 4,600 rivets and washers in her construction.³⁶

On some ships, such as the Gokstad ship, the planks were lashed to the frame using flexible lashings, rather than being firmly fixed.³⁷ Where the strake crossed a rib, a cleat was fabricated on the inboard side of the strake that stood proud above the surface of the strake. The rib rested in the cleat, and the lashing that fixed the strake to the rib passed through the cleat.³⁸

As a result, ships were elastic, riding over the waves, rather than taking the full impact of each swell. Similarly, the knees of the Skuldelev 3 ship were not firmly fixed, allowing the frame and the hull to twist relative to one another, resulting in a very supple ship.³⁹

On other ships, strakes were fastened to the frame with wooden dowels (treenails) wedged into place with hard wooden wedges. The treenails for ships found at Hedeby were made of tough, flexible willow wedged with oak, although a variety of other species were also used in ships built at other locations.⁴⁰



Viking ships were clinker-built, with the hull constructed upwards from the keel using overlapping strakes riveted together. Internal ribs and framing provided the structural support (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).

In some cases, clenched iron nails or iron rivets attached the strakes to the frame.⁴¹

Even though seams between the planks were sealed with animal hair coated with tar, the elasticity of the ships made them prone to leaks, especially in rough seas. It's likely that one crew member bailed full time, with others helping when necessary. In *Grettis saga*, there's a description of bailing during rough seas. The crew was forced to bail round the clock, a wet and tiring job. Two buckets were used, with a full one carried up while the empty one was passed back down to be refilled.⁴²

One can only imagine that standing in the bilge filling buckets must truly have been a miserable job. When Grettir took over filling the buckets, eight men were needed to empty the buckets in order to keep up with him.

Bailers are common archaeological finds. They're made of wood, often about 20 inches (50 centimeters) long, with an integral handle and shaped to allow water to be scooped up by the bailer.⁴³

During the early part of the Viking age, oak was used throughout the ship. Tall, straight trees were selected for masts and planks. The archaeological evidence shows that the quality of ship timbers declined throughout the Viking era. Later ships were made with planks that were shorter and less broad, because fewer high-quality oak trees were available.⁴⁴

Some ships were built with wood salvaged from earlier ships, such as the Skuldelev 5 ship. While the design and construction of that ship were competent, the materials used were substandard, and she has been described as a "coffin ship."⁴⁵ She was built from pine, ash, and oak, using planks salvaged from at least two other ships. Numerous holes from previous uses were simply plugged.⁴⁶ By the end of the Viking age, pine was extensively used for ship construction.⁴⁷

Oak planks were created from logs by *riving*, whereby thinner and thinner radial splits were made in the logs using wedges until planks of the desired thickness were created. Planks made in this manner result in a uniform piece of wood because the grain runs the entire length of the plank. Compared to modern sawed planks, the radially split planks were stronger, with a smaller likelihood of splitting, warping, or shrinking. In addition, the riven planks were more easily worked with hand-tools than sawed planks.

From a typical 40 inches (1 meter) diameter trunk, perhaps 20 planks, each about 12 inches (30 centimeters) broad could be created. The planking used in the Gokstad ship is only 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) thick below the waterline, remarkably thin considering the rugged seas these ships must have encountered on the open ocean.

It has estimated that for a typical 65 feet (20 meters) longship, approximately 75 cubic yards (58 cubic meters) of oak was required. This is equivalent to eleven oak tree trunks, each 40 inches (1 meter) in diameter and 16 feet (5 meters) long, along with a single 60 feet (18 meters) long trunk for the keel.

Oaks of this size and of sufficient quality would be difficult, if not impossible, to find today.

Trees were sought that grew in the forms needed to make floors, frames, knees, ribs, and other odd shapes. Since the grain of the wood naturally followed the required shape, these pieces were much stronger than if they had been fabricated from straight wood.

A significant portion of the total time to build a ship was spent in the forest, finding trees of the right size, shape, and species for creating the parts of the ship.⁴⁸ Small models of ship parts have been found in Bergen and other ship-building centers which have been interpreted as models used to select trees in the forest having the right shapes.⁴⁹ Large branches were cut separately before the trunk was felled to avoid the damage to correctly shaped branches that would occur if the tree fell with the branches in place.⁵⁰

Long straight trees for planks were found in dense, old growth forests. Curved shapes for the frame were found in trees that grew along the edges of the woods, or in open land with free standing trees.⁵¹

In order to avoid having to transport large pieces of wood from the forest to the shipyard, much of the rough processing took place in the forest, on the site where the wood was cut. Logs were rough split, probably into eighths, for transport. Curved timbers were rough worked to remove at least a portion of the unneeded volume of wood.⁵² For many of these curved shapes, only 20 percent of the original wood in the cut pieces was used, so removing as much of the unneeded wood as possible before transport resulted in a significant reduction in the effort required to move the rough worked pieces to the shipyard.⁵³ Curved timbers were stored underwater to keep the timber green and workable until the piece was fabricated.⁵⁴

Ships were built using simple tools. Long-hafted axes were used to fell the trees. Tree trunks were split into planks using wedges driven by hammers. Planks were trimmed using short-hafted T-shape broad axes. These broad axes appear to be the symbolic tool of ship-builders, as evidenced by their appearance and use in the images on the Bayeux tapestry.⁵⁵ The tapestry shows William giving orders for the construction of the fleet to a master-builder holding a short-hafted T-shape axe.

Planes were not needed to smooth the planks; ship builders could make the surfaces of the planks sufficiently smooth using only their axes. The overlapping edges of the strakes, however, were smoothed with a plane in order to obtain a tight fit.

Where the strakes overlapped, a groove was cut with a mold scraper. Tarred woolen yarn or animal hair was forced into the groove to make the joint between strakes as watertight as possible.⁵⁶ The mold scraper was also used to carve decorative patterns on the planks. Holes were made using a spoon-shaped bore fixed in a wooden drill. The builder applied pressure to the bore by pressing on the tool with his breastbone and he turned the tool with his hands.



The Bayeux tapestry tells the story of the Norman invasion of England in 1066. This detail depicts William giving orders for the construction of an invasion fleet to his master-builder, who holds a short-hafted T-shape axe, the tool of choice for fine shaping work.

Many other wooden components were required for a ship. Cleats, toggles, shroud-pins, pulley-blocks, parrels, and other wooden components were fabricated for use on the ship.

It's not known what, if any, measurement instruments were used. It's certain that ship-builders had a very clear mental picture of the completed ship during the construction process.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar tells of the construction of the *Ormr inn langi* (*The Long Serpent*). Þorbergr skafhögg (smoothing-blow) made the stem and stern, but he was obliged to leave the building site before the ship was completed. When he returned, he apparently was not pleased with what he saw. Secretly at night, he cut crossing diagonal incisions into the upper strakes on one side, ruining the ship. The next morning, King Óláfr, in a rage, vowed death to the man who had done the damage. Þorbergr freely admitted to the deed, and the king ordered him to repair the ship so that it was just as fine as before. Þorbergr didn't replace the damaged strakes, but rather, took yet more material off with his axe, until the damage disappeared. Everyone agreed the ship now looked better than before, and King Óláfr asked him to do the same to the other side of the ship. *Ormr inn langi* was considered to be the best ship ever built in Norway.⁵⁷

There is little doubt that ship builders used plumb-lines together with staves and strings to lay out the ship. It's been suggested that a measuring stick

called a boat ell was used to measure the angles between the runs of the strakes, and that master ship builders recorded the details of their designs with marks cut into this stick. Ship designs are based on segments of circles with different diameters based on the length of the keel.⁵⁸

In one case mentioned in the stories, a ship was built from a model. In *Króka-Refs saga*, Refr Steinsson built a ship based on a toy model given to him as a child. Refr's ship was considered to be a fine, sea-worthy ship.⁵⁹

It's unclear how many man-hours were required to build a ship. King Óláfr Tryggvasson's *Ormr inn langi* was built in one winter by a team led by a master ship builder (*höfuðsmiðr*). The team included stem-smiths (*stafnsmiðr*) along with men who fitted the timbers, shaped the timbers, set the rivets, and transported the timber.⁶⁰

In contrast, the modern knörr replica *Roar Ege* took several dozen people two years to build, a total of 15,000 man-hours, in part because Viking era construction techniques had to be re-invented.⁶¹

It's not clear how the wood was treated to prevent rot and attacks by other organisms. Evidence suggests that ships were painted, often elaborately. One study suggests tar and resin from pine trees was mixed with pigment and linseed oil to protect the wood.⁶²

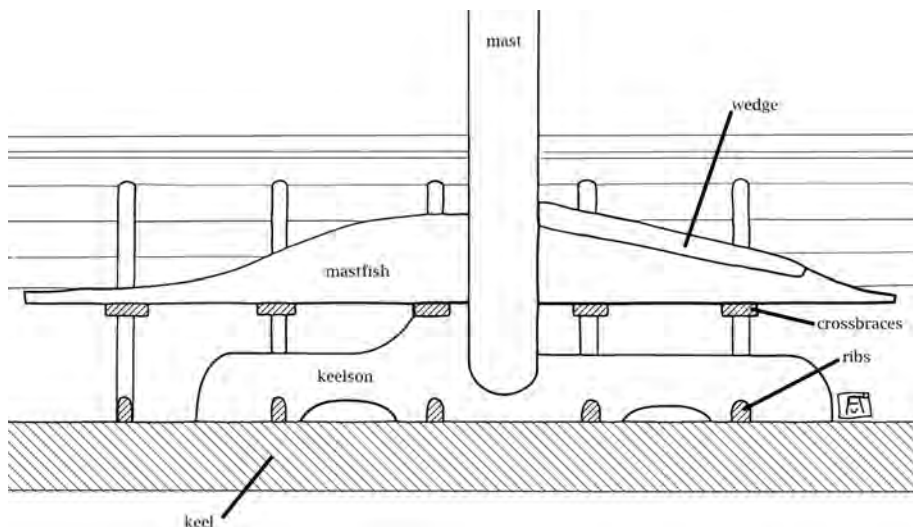
Regardless, the sagas say that ships could be attacked by marine borers. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Bjarni Grímólfsson's ship became infested with sea worms while returning to Greenland from Vínland, so that the ship was no longer sea-worthy. The ship's boat was in good condition, because it had been smeared with tar made of seal blubber (*seltjara*), which prevented the worms from infesting the wood. The crew drew lots, and those that could fit in the boat made their way back to Greenland. The rest of the crew perished.⁶³

Saga evidence suggests that ships were routinely pulled up on shore and placed in covered shelters (*naust*) when not in use to protect them from damage. *Grettis saga* tells of Viking raiders who arrived on an island in Norway where Grettir Ásmundarson was staying as a guest of Þorfinnr Kársson. When they landed, the Vikings dragged Þorfinnr's warship (*karfi*) out of the boatshed where it was stored, and put their own small ship in its place.⁶⁴

For ships built in the later part of the Viking age, when inferior species substituted for oak, this kind of protection was not optional. Some of these ships had to have been kept out of water and under cover at all times, unless actually in use, to prevent rot in species such as ash that were used in place of oak.⁶⁵

As with other Viking-age objects, ships were highly decorated. Serpent heads sometimes decorated the prows of ships. Early Icelandic laws prohibited ships with serpent head prows from approaching land, lest the frightening appearance of the ship threaten the tranquility of the *landvættir* (land spirits).⁶⁶

A ship's sail and rigging were very precious items. It's quite possible that the sail and rigging were worth as much as the hull.⁶⁷ Typically, the sail was



The mast on Viking ships was firmly seated so that the force from the wind on the sail was efficiently transmitted to the hull. The sketch shows the mast seating on the Gokstad ship, found in Norway. The mast fit into the keelson, which had a rounded socket to permit the mast to be lowered and unstepped without having to lift the heavy mast out of a socket. The mastfish helped carry the propulsive force from the mast to the hull (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).

made from the finest grade of homespun wool, woven on the same vertical loom in the home that was used for clothing and other fabrics. A normal-sized sail would require a weaver's full-time labor for the better part of a year simply to weave the fabric. *Egils saga* says that while Egill Skalla-Grimsson stayed with Arinbjörn Þórisson one winter in Norway, he had an elaborate sail made for Arinbjörn as a gift.⁶⁸

The sail for the Skuldelev 1 knörr was on the order of 100 square yards (84 square meters). A sail of this size would require fabric on the order of 30 ounces/square yards (1000 grams/square meter) to make a durable, airtight sail.⁷⁰ When completed, the sail was coated with animal fats and oils to protect it from the elements. Literary sources say that sails were often striped.

Sails were square and had a low aspect ratio. The sail for the Skuldelev 1 knörr had a height of approximately 18 feet (5.5 meters) and a length of approximately 55 feet (16.5 meters), resulting in an aspect ratio of 0.33.

The mast was stepped into a socket in the keelson, a longitudinal timber on top of the keel. The keelson rested on the keel, but was not fastened to the keel. Instead, it connected to multiple ribs on both sides.

The keelson transferred all of the forces of propulsion generated by the sail to the hull of the ship, and so it was a very substantial piece of oak.

In order to avoid having to lift the full weight of the mast to get the boat

of the mast in and out of the keelson socket when stepping or unstepping the mast, the socket was rounded in the forward direction. As a result the boot of the mast slipped in and out without having to lift the entire mast up over a lip.

A mast partner (sometimes called a mastfish because its shape is reminiscent of that of a fish) located at the lower beam level spread out the horizontal forces transmitted from the sail to the hull, greatly relieving the stress on the socket in the keelson. Some ships did not use a mastfish.

The mastfish on the Gokstad ship was a single piece of oak 16 feet (5 meters) long, 40 inches (1 meter) wide, and 20 inches (50 centimeters) thick.⁷¹ The Gokstad mastfish rested on four crossbraces, and on a raised portion of the keelson. A wedge was inserted in the mastfish aft of the mast to help hold the mast in place, but it could be easily removed when the mast was to be unstepped.⁷²

The details of the ship's rigging are obscure. Evidence indicates that a forestay was used, as well as shrouds from the mast to the sides of the ship aft. There is little evidence for a backstay, and probably none was needed because of the strong seating of the mast.

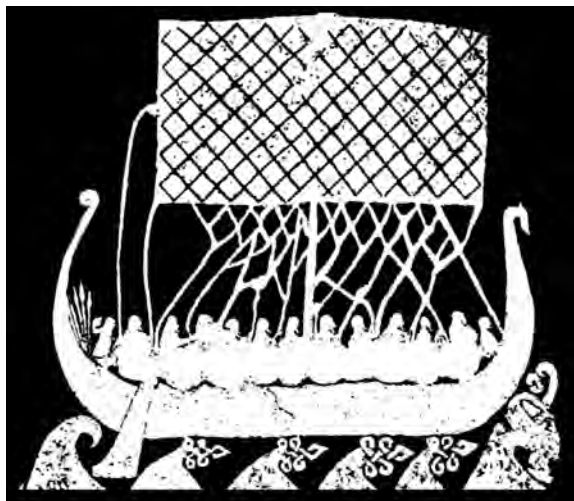
For the Skuldelev 3 knörr, more than 440 yards (400 meters) of rope of various sizes was required for the rigging.⁷³ Some sources claim that ropes were made of hemp, or from walrus or seal skin.⁷⁴ These skin ropes were highly prized, and were an important trade item. They were probably made by cutting the hide in a spiral around the body of the creature.

Ohthere was a Norwegian merchant who visited King Alfred's court in Wessex at the end of the 9th century. His stories about his travels are preserved in Anglo-Saxon documents. Ohthere said he traveled to the White Sea, both to explore the country, but also to hunt walrus for their ivory, and for their skin which, according to Ohthere, made excellent ship's cables.⁷⁵



The *Íslendingur* is a modern replica of the Gokstad ship. The mastfish, with its distinctive fish-like shape, and the wedge are visible in the photograph (author photograph).

More evidence for animal skin ropes comes from after the Viking age, in *Íslendinga saga*. A ship traveling from Norway to Iceland was wrecked, and four crew members survived for thirteen days by eating the walrus-hide tackle with butter, the only part of the cargo that was salvaged.⁷⁶



This detail from the Riddare picture stone found at Hejnum, Gotland, shows a Viking ship under sail. As depicted on many Viking-age picture stone, the ship's sail has two puzzling features: an interlace of lines under the sail, and a cross-hatch pattern on the sail. The interlace may have been used to fine-tune the sail's shape, and the cross-hatch may represent hide reinforcements sewn onto the sail.

Archaeological sources provide little evidence of hemp or animal skin ropes being used for nautical applications. Instead, they suggest that bast fiber from oak, elm, or lime (also known as linden or basswood) trees was used for lines and ropes.⁷⁷

Perhaps the reason that animal skin ropes and lines are not found was that they were too valuable to have been discarded carelessly where a modern archaeologist could find them. Additionally, hemp is not likely to be found since it decays readily.⁷⁸

Horsehair ropes were commonly used for a variety of purposes in later medieval times and may have been used on-board ship during Viking times.

Images of ships under sail on picture stones from the Viking age show an interlace at the foot of the sail. It has been suggested that this was used to fine tune the curve of the sail to get the best speed possible as close to the wind as possible.⁷⁹ An alternate explanation is that the interlace was used to reef the sail in high winds. Pulling on the bottom of the interlace caused the sail to pucker, reducing its effectiveness.⁸⁰

The stone carvings also show a cross-hatch pattern on the sail whose purpose is unknown. It has long been thought simply to be artistic license. It's been suggested that the cross-hatch was actually walrus-hide (or other leather) reinforcements to help homespun wool hold its shape.⁸¹

The sagas talk about a *beiti-áss* (cruising pole), a spar used to hold one corner of the sail further forward, allowing the ship to sail closer to the wind. Nothing has been found in any of the Viking ship wrecks that can be identified

as a beiti-áss, but some ships have notched timbers that are thought to have held one end of the beiti-áss when it was set.⁸² *Ynglinga saga* tells of King Eysteinn, who sat at the tiller of his ship when another ship sailed close by. There were some swells, and the beiti-áss of the other ship knocked the king overboard, causing his death.⁸³

When the sail was furled, the sail and yard were stored on wooden upright stanchions located fore and aft. It's possible that oars were stored here, as well.

Anchors were usually made from stone or iron lashed into a wooden frame. The anchor from the Oseberg ship burial is entirely made of iron and is about 40 inches (1 meter) in the long dimension and weighed 22 pounds (10 kilograms).⁸⁴ Some of the more elaborate anchors that have been found use an iron bound wooden shank and have iron rings to accommodate the cable. Later anchors had flukes at the ends of the anchor arms to increase holding power.

The tiller and a side rudder were located on the starboard side. The rudder was held away from the side of the ship by a wooden nipple, to which it attached by a knotted rope.

The side rudder is not very effective for large course changes, but it is easily handled because of its balance. Some rudders have multiple tiller holes which suggest they were used in a "half-up" position to control the course of the ship up until the last moment before beaching.

While it has been estimated that the Gokstad ship could carry full sail in winds up to 45 knots (24 meters/second),⁸⁵ the restricted freeboard of these ships must have greatly limited the captain's options in heavy weather. That explains how, on one hand, Viking ships can be described as performing well in adverse conditions, and how, on the other hand, the sagas describe ships being blown far off their intended course during storms.

Estimates of the capabilities of Viking era ships vary from one report to the next, and even amongst organizations operating modern replicas. Estimates of top speeds under ideal conditions are in the 20 to 25 knot range. It's unlikely that these extreme speeds were common; sailing this hard exhausts the crew and strains the fittings and rigging. The crew of the replica knörr *Gaia* reported that they achieved speeds of 15 knots or more under favorable conditions.⁸⁶



Viking ships used a side rudder, held away from the hull by a wooden nipple. A rope fastening passed through the rudder, nipple, and hull and was fastened to the frame to hold the rudder in place (illustration by Andrew P. Volpe).

Effective speeds were certainly less, perhaps more like 3 to 6 knots in fair weather. An analysis of Viking age voyages described in the medieval literature suggests an average speed of 5 knots. In unfavorable conditions, the speed probably dropped to 2 knots.⁸⁷

Because of the minimal freeboard, the maximum heel of these ships was on the order of 15 degrees.⁸⁸ For the Gokstad ship in a 16 knot wind (8.6 meters/second) at her most efficient, the ship had to traverse 3 miles in order to sail 1 mile to windward, implying a speed made good to windward of only 2 knots.⁸⁹

It's still unclear how Viking ships can be so efficient under sail. One theory is that a "sausage" of air is trapped between the keel and the upper strakes, which reduces resistance to forward motion and increases stability by decreasing the tendency of the ship to lean.

Typical Viking sea voyages were along the coast, at a safe distance offshore. Dead reckoning between known points was used to determine distance run. Sailing at night was avoided. Ships were beached at the end of the day, avoiding navigational hazards difficult to see at night, and allowing a cooking fire to be safely kindled on shore.⁹⁰ It seems unlikely that fires were lit on-board a ship.

If travel at night were necessary, it's possible that sounding lines were used to maintain a course along a fixed depth. While the technique could be used along the coast of the British Isles, it would have been useless in Scandinavia, where the waters immediately off the coast are very deep.⁹¹

There is evidence that tents were carried on board ship. Tent frames were found in both the Gokstad and Oseberg ship burials. Tenting material or even the sail could be put to use to create shelter on board ship when beached or stopped for the night.

When Viking sailors needed to cross open ocean, they sailed along lines of constant latitude until they reached their destination. There is no evidence that charts were used, but texts indicate that navigators of the period had a clear mental picture of the layout of their world. For example, Iceland is "opposite" a specific point on the Norwegian coast. If one sailed west from this traditional departure point, and one maintained a constant latitude, one expected to see certain marine creatures and certain cloud formations and certain landmarks at certain times, and ultimately, to reach Iceland a certain time later.

The sailing directions for Greenland are given in the *Landnámabók*. To get to Greenland, Viking navigators followed the Norwegian coast to Hænar (where the fjord on which Bergen lies opens to the sea). From there, they sailed due west, passing north of the Shetlands, which were barely visible, and south of the Faeroes, such that the sea reached half way up the mountains. They passed so far south of Iceland that sailors were aware of its presence only by the birds and whales from it.⁹² From a position south of Iceland, there was nothing but open ocean until reaching Greenland.



It's likely that ships carried tents for use when the ship landed. This modern reproduction is based on the smaller of the tents found in the Oseberg ship burial. The tent goes up easily. A single person can erect it, yet the tent is roomy enough for an entire ship's company (author photograph).

The voyage is 850 nautical miles (1600 kilometers), yet the description shows that even in open ocean, navigation marks existed that could be used by Viking sailors. Whale feeding grounds, concentrations of nautical birds, and swells could all be used to help confirm that the ship was on course.

Although controversial, it's unlikely that the Norse used any navigational instruments. The sun-compass and the sun-stone sometimes mentioned are most likely modern fabrications.⁹³

The *sólarsteinn* (sun stone) is not mentioned in the *Sagas of Icelanders*, although the term appears in the contemporary sagas, set after the end of the Viking age. There are no descriptions of its use for navigation in the stories. Even if the sun-stone were a polarizing stone, as some believe, the device would have only limited navigational use in northern latitudes.

Some believe that a Viking sun compass survives as a wooden fragment that was found at Unartoq, Greenland, the site of a Benedictine monastery in Viking-age Greenland. The fragment is half of a disc inscribed with notches.⁹⁴

This interpretation of the artifact seems fanciful. The disc is too small to make a functional navigational tool,⁹⁵ and the notches are too irregularly spaced to be useful for navigation.⁹⁶ On the other hand, others argue that reproductions of the Unartog sun-compass can be used for effective navigation.⁹⁷

Some believe that portable sundials existed in the period, corrected by month, that allowed a navigator to determine time of day or latitude based on differences in the length of a shadow. Most doubt the existence of even this simple navigational tool.

Regardless, there is evidence that skilled astronomical observations were made during the Viking era, necessary for keeping the calendar synchronized with the apparent motion of the sun. Several of the earliest surviving Icelandic textbooks, although dating from after the saga age, teach astronomy. By the beginning of the 12th century, Stjörnu-Oddi (Star-Oddi) Helgason had created *Oddatala*, charts of the sun's altitude at noon and its bearing at sunrise and sunset throughout the year in Iceland.⁹⁸

In addition, Viking navigators understood the relationship between latitude and the sun's height at noon. Chapter 2 of *Grænlandinga saga* describes the motion of the sun in winter as observed in Vínland in an apparent attempt to fix the latitude of the site.⁹⁹ Despite many attempts to interpret the observations,¹⁰⁰ little definitive can be said other than that the location was considerably south of Iceland.

In order to maintain a constant latitude while crossing open ocean, some believe that saga-age navigators employed a gnomon that measured the sun's height at noon. This instrument used a wooden disc floating in a pail of water. In the center of the disc was a vertical peg. At noon, the length of the peg's shadow was marked on the disc. On each subsequent day of the voyage, the navigator made certain that the peg's shadow fell on the mark at noon, ensuring that the ship maintained a constant latitude.

Because of the slow apparent vertical motion of the sun in high latitudes, it appears that this device could be effective and accurate. Large errors in the estimate of local noon, or of the date, would still allow a navigator to estimate his north-south position to within 30 nautical miles.¹⁰¹ To my knowledge, there is no solid evidence that such devices were used by navigators in the Viking age,¹⁰² although fragments found at Stóra-Borg in south Iceland have been interpreted as parts of a gnomon.¹⁰³

The description of Bjarni Herjólfsson's voyage to Greenland shows clearly that the sun was used for finding one's bearings by Viking-age navigators. After sailing west from Iceland, Bjarni and his crew were tossed about by a storm and enveloped in fog, ending up far off course. When the weather cleared and they saw the sun, they were able to get their bearings, which allowed them to sail north to the proper latitude, and then directly to their destination in Greenland, even though none of them had sailed in those waters before.¹⁰⁴

While it appears that Viking sailors must have known the arts of dead

reckoning, of using a sounding line to measure depth, and of determining position from sun and stars, clearly one of the main qualifications of a navigator in the Viking age was that he had been to the destination before.

The value of having sailed the route before is illustrated by an episode from *Grænlendinga saga*. Þorsteinn Eiríksson wanted to sail to Vínland from Greenland to recover the body of his brother, Þorvaldr, who had been killed by natives on a previous voyage. There is no implication that any of the crew had been on the previous Vínland voyages, and it's possible that Þorsteinn tried to sail directly to where his brother was buried, rather than taking the more cautious route followed by the earlier Vínland voyages along the coast. They sailed out of sight of land and spent all summer being tossed about, not knowing where they were, before making landfall back in Greenland.¹⁰⁵

Without navigational instruments, or any knowledge of the waters in which they sailed, Þorsteinn and his crew were quite literally lost at sea.

Boats

The distinction between a small ship and a large boat was probably blurry in the Viking age. Construction details shared many similarities: clinker-built strakes attached to an internal frame. However, the vessel a farmer might use to cross from one side to the other of a protected fjord might differ significantly in size and robustness from the vessel used by traders to cross the open waters of the Atlantic while loaded with cargo.

In the sagas, many different words are used to describe water vessels, and it's not always clear how the vessels differed. *Bátr* (boat) seems to refer only to small two or four oared boats. An eight oared boat is referred to in the texts as a *skip* (ship).¹⁰⁶ A convenient dividing line between boat and ship is 40 feet (12 meters) overall length, with considerable overlap on either side.¹⁰⁷

Boats were important to saga-age Icelanders, not only for fishing, but also for transportation. The coastline of much of Iceland is heavily indented by rugged fjords. If one wanted to get from a farm on one side of the fjord to a farm on the other side, it would be far quicker to row a boat for an hour across the fjord than to ride a horse for many hours all the way around the fjord. Indeed, the river feeding the fjord might not even be fordable without going a considerable distance upstream.

The sagas are filled with examples of travelers in a hurry who left their horses behind to use a boat in order to speed their journeys. Gísli Súrsson feared his brother-in-law Vésteinn Vésteinsson might visit in the midst of dangerous situation, so he sent his farm hands to warn Vésteinn to stay home. They took a boat from Haukadalsr, where Gísli's farm was located, and rowed across Dýrafjörðr to the farm at Bersastaðir, where they borrowed fast horses to continue their journey over the heath to Vésteinn's farm. They missed



Vésteinn Vésteinsson rode over the heath to Dýrafjörðr through the valley Gemlufallsdalr, visible on the opposite of the fjord. To save him the trouble of having to ride all the way around the fjord to get to Haukadálr, his kinswoman at the farm at Gemlufall had him ferried by boat across the fjord to Þingeyri, where today, the Viking ship replica *Vésteinn* is moored. At Þingeyri, Vésteinn borrowed a horse and continued his journey to Haukadálr and to his death (author photograph).

Vésteinn and finally caught up to him as he was traveling across the heath back to Dýrafjörðr. Despite the message of warning, Vésteinn decided to continue his journey, saying, “now, all waters flow to Dýrafjörðr, and that is where I will ride.”¹⁰⁸

His kinswoman at Gemlufall on the shore of Dýrafjörðr had Vésteinn ferried across the fjord to Þingeyri. Þorvaldr gneisti (spark) lent him a horse, and Vésteinn continued his journey to Gísli at Haukadálr. There, he met his death.¹⁰⁹

The extended story gives a sense of how travelers avoided long land journeys around the fjord by taking a short boat journey, even if it meant borrowing horses. In Vésteinn’s case, the 2 miles (3 kilometers) boat trip across Dýrafjörðr was preferable to the 22 miles (35 kilometers) journey around the fjord on horseback.

It’s highly likely that the boats used in Iceland strongly resembled those used in Scandinavia, several of which have survived very well. Notably, the Oseberg ship burial in Norway had one boat, and the Gokstad ship burial had three boats, two of which survived in good condition.

The largest Gokstad boat is 32 feet (9.75 meters) long, built entirely of oak, with five strakes, internal ribbing, and pine floorboards. The boat is extraor-

dinarily light and delicate, yet apparently suited to its use. There are no provisions for a sail, but there are oarlocks for three pairs of oars. The boat was steered with a side rudder, like ships of the time.¹¹⁰

One difference between Icelandic boats and Scandinavian boats is in the wood used for their construction. While good quality timber for boats was readily available in Scandinavia, saga-age Icelanders were forced to use driftwood and imported timber for their boats. It's been suggested that most of the Icelandic boats were made from lower-quality driftwood.¹¹¹

The remains of several boats from the saga age have been found in Iceland, typically in the form of boat graves.¹¹² This form of burial is well known in Scandinavia, and the sagas describe boat burials taking place in Iceland. For example, *Gísla saga* says that Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson was laid in a boat and a mound was raised according to the ancient customs.¹¹³

Generally, the wood in these boat finds has decayed, leaving only an outline of the boat in the soil. Occasionally, the iron rivets that held the strakes of the boat together are found.

The boat grave found in Dalvík in north Iceland was 23 feet (7 meters) long, 5 feet (1.5 meters) broad, and 20 inches (50 centimeters) deep.¹¹⁴ One has to ask whether these boat graves represent boats actually used for water transport and taken out of service to be used in a grave, or whether they represent something built specifically for the grave and never intended to be used on the water.

Logboats, hollowed from a single log, dating from the Viking age have been found in Scandinavia.¹¹⁵ No evidence or suggestion of their use has been found in Iceland.

Finds in Scandinavia show clear evidence that sails were used on at least some boats. Mast partners have been found in association with boat finds. Although the boat found at Rong in Norway was broken up when found, it appears to have had room for eight pairs of rowers, and it had a substantial mast partner for seating the mast.¹¹⁶

The sagas tell of boats powered by sail. *Laxdæla saga* says that Þorsteinn surtr (black) decided to move his household. While his livestock were being driven along the coast, he and eleven family members sailed a boat, piled high with chests containing their possessions. In bad weather, they sailed onto a skerry. Even though Þorsteinn had the sail struck immediately, a gust of wind heeled the boat over, and all but one of his family perished.¹¹⁷

In the sagas, the size of boats is often specified by the number of oars. Böðvarr Egilsson and five of his father's hired hands used an eight-oared boat to travel across Borgarfjörður to bring home timber from a merchant ship.¹¹⁸ During a time of famine, a whale drifted ashore at Reykjarfjörður in west Iceland. Þorgrímr Önundarson and eleven others set off in a ten-oared boat to claim the whale.¹¹⁹

Boats were used for fishing as well as for transport. Þorgeirr Önundarson

was in the habit of rowing out from the farm at Reykjarfjörður to catch fish, because the fjords there were full of fish.¹²⁰

Boats typically were stored undercover in a boatshed (*naust*), protected from the elements. As Þorgeirr prepared to go fishing from Reykjarfjörður one morning with two other men, he was attacked by Þorfinnr, who was hiding in the boatshed.¹²¹

Sveinungr Þórisson, on the other hand, used his boatshed to shelter sheep in bad winter weather. His boat was lying upside down on the ground, with the prows buried in the earth, and drifted snow under the gunwales. Sveinungr had Gunnarr Þiðrandabani hide under the boat so he wouldn't be spotted by Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson, who were pursuing him.¹²²

Land Travel

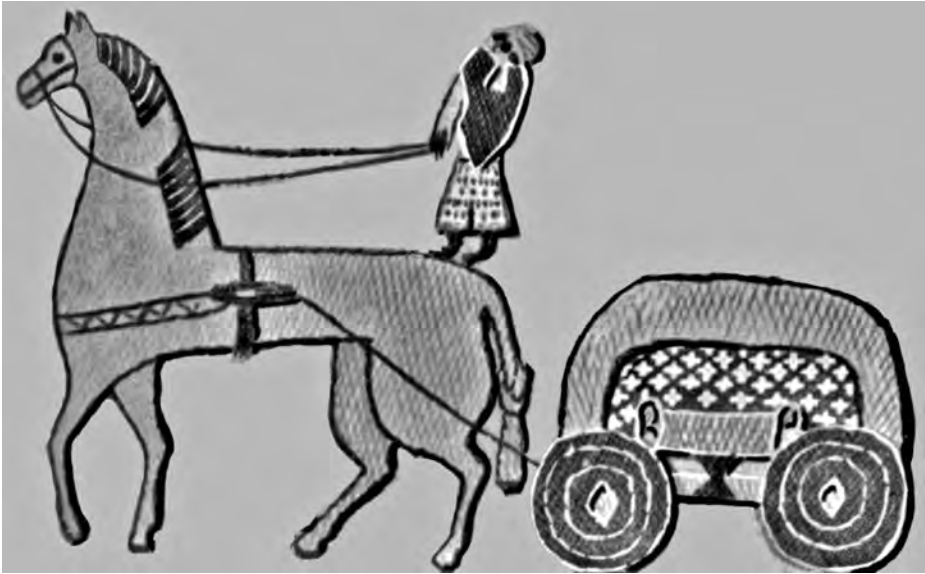
Settlers in Iceland probably expected that overland travel in their new home would be at least as difficult as it was in their former homelands. Like Norway, much of the coastline of Iceland is heavily indented with rugged fjords. Overland travel involved difficult journeys around fjords and over mountainous terrain.

In addition, Iceland had additional challenges to land travel that the settlers had not experienced in their homelands. Lava fields, powerful glacial rivers, sand wastes, and desolate highland heaths were significant barriers to travel.

Facing these barriers in their new land, the first Icelanders probably expected to be somewhat isolated. Yet overland travel, while difficult, was possible. Routes were found through the desolate interior that passed by grasslands for grazing horses, and by hot springs which provided soothing baths for weary travelers. These routes bypassed the glaciers and their treacherous rivers and sand wastes.

Landnámabók tells how one of the major interior routes was discovered when explorers from the north saw the tracks of explorers from the south and realized that travel through the interior was possible.¹²³ Horse trails were established throughout the island. While difficult and dangerous, these paths created the means for Icelanders to travel overland in order to communicate and interact with each other to a degree that was atypical for other lands in the Viking age.

People traveled for many reasons: for trade, for battle, for games, for þing meetings, and for socializing. When people traveled overland in Iceland, typically, they traveled on horseback, carrying what they needed on pack-horses. Other Viking lands have evidence of horse-drawn wagons and sledges, along with other means of travel such as skis, snowshoes, and ice skates, but little evidence for the use of these other transport means exists in Iceland, except possibly for sledges, which are often mentioned in the sagas. For example, two



The tapestry found in the Oseberg ship burial shows several horse-drawn wagons carrying passengers and cargo. The breast-harnesses depicted would have provided enough tractive force to pull a load of about 1100 pounds (500 kilograms).

farmhands were loading hay into a sledge one winter's day when Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson approached to kill one of them.¹²⁴

In winter, sledges were the preferred means for transporting cargo overland. In some ways, overland transportation was actually easier in winter. Frozen lakes and rivers made some of the routes very much easier than in summer, and a sledge could carry heavier loads than a cart. Northern people waited until winter to transport heavy items such as timber and stones.¹²⁵

The sledges found in the Oseberg burial consist of a frame and bed attached to two up-turned runners.¹²⁶ A removable box-like body could be fitted to the sledge in order to carry more cargo. The largest Oseberg sledge was 2.25 m (7 ft) long.

Carts are much less frequently mentioned in the sagas. After Þorvaldr Steingrímsson was wounded in a battle in north Iceland, his mother Helga Eyjólfssdóttir went to the battle site to ask how her son had conducted himself in the battle. Her brother, Víga-Glúmr, said no one had been braver. Helga asked to see the body. She had her son, who still clung to life, lifted into a cart. She took him home, bathed him, bandaged him, and he survived his wounds to fight again.¹²⁷

Little information exists about the kind of carts or wagons used in the Viking lands because few have survived. The most notable is the Oseberg wagon, part of a very rich ship burial.¹²⁸ The wagon must surely have been built for a

purpose other than transport. It is richly decorated to a very high standard and is constructed such that it can not turn.

Some of the best evidence about wagons comes from images on tapestries, such as the tapestry found in the Oseberg burial.¹²⁹ The tapestry depicts a scene in which wagons are carrying both cargo and passengers. The wagons are drawn by horses using breast-harnesses that would have allowed enough tractive force to pull a load of about 1100 pounds (500 kilograms).¹³⁰

During the Viking age, wagons are not thought to have been widely used in the Scandinavian lands and were restricted to southern regions where road systems existed that made them practical.¹³¹ It seems unlikely they would have seen wide use in the rougher terrain found in Iceland, even in the gentler valleys.¹³²

Skis and skates were certainly used for sport in Viking lands, but they also had practical uses for winter travel. On snow covered ground or on ice, skiing or skating would have been much easier than struggling through the snow or over ice on foot or on horseback.

Skis are mentioned in the sagas, but typically are used in foreign lands such as Norway, rather than Iceland. Egill Skalla-Grímsson traveled in Norway with envoys of King Hákon inn góði (the good) on a mission for the king, struggling with horses and sledges through deep snow. They separated, and the envoys sent Egill and his men on a path they were not likely to survive, which was the envoys' intent. As soon as Egill and his men were out of sight, the king's envoys put on skis and were able to travel easily through the deep snow back to the king.¹³³

Several different styles of skis have been found in Scandinavia,¹³⁴ but none in Iceland. Most skis are made from pine, in part because the pine resin helps the glide of the ski. Horizontal holes carried the straps that attached the skis to the foot. The underside of the ski was often grooved for stability and additional glide. A pair of skis found in Norway were about 81 inches (205 centimeters) long.¹³⁵ Unmatched skis were used as well, especially for hunting, with one long gliding ski on the left foot and a short, fur-covered kicking ski on the right for propulsion.¹³⁶

Ice skates were used in other Viking lands, but again, there is little evidence of their use in saga-age Iceland. Ice skates were made of bone, typically from the metatarsal bones of horses or cattle.¹³⁷ Leather straps or thongs threaded through horizontal holes in the bones were used to tie the skates to the feet. An iron-tipped pole was used for propulsion. Because the skates have no edge, it is not possible to turn or stop as with modern ice skates. Regardless, good speeds are easily obtainable with replica bone ice skates.

Ice skates virtually identical to medieval Scandinavian finds were still in use in the last century in Iceland. I talked to an elderly woman who, as a child, skated on Tjörnin, the pond in Reykjavík, using bone ice skates.¹³⁸ A pair of bone skates on display at the Skógasafn museum in south Iceland were last

used by their owner in the year 1972.¹³⁹ It's quite possible that similar ice skates were in use in the saga age.

The best we can say is that when people traveled overland in saga-age Iceland, if they didn't walk on their own two feet, they probably used horses.

Horses in the Viking age resembled modern Icelandic horses, which are small, but sturdy, strong, and willing. In the saga age, they are thought to have been no larger than 15 hands high, about 150 centimeters,¹⁴⁰ similar to modern Icelandic horses.

An Icelandic horse breeder told me that he expects a typical speed for horse and rider on a long trip to be about 4 to 5 miles/hour (6 to 8 kilometers/hour).¹⁴¹ Much greater speed is possible for short distances. Sturla Þórðarson and Órækja Snorrason rode from Flugumýri to Grenjaðarstaðir in two days, staying overnight at Miklagarðr.¹⁴² The distance of their route would have been about 80 miles (130 kilometers). On the third day, they arrived at their destination at Skinnastaðir in the mid-afternoon.

People were frequently buried with their horses in saga-age Iceland and in other Viking lands. Of the 157 pagan graves studied in Iceland, 84 contained horses, and many contained more than one.¹⁴³ While it was not common to bury the horse with all of its gear, a great deal of horse equipment survives as grave goods.

Snaffle bits were the most common type of bit, having two rings and a jointed mouthpiece. Many examples have been found in Iceland.¹⁴⁴ Very elaborate bridles with decorative bronze mounts have been found in other Viking lands, such as in the Borre grave mound in Norway.¹⁴⁵

Stirrups typically had tall hoops with heavy square loops for the leather strap, and some had decorative plates, such as the three bronze stirrups found in Iceland.¹⁴⁶ The largest is 6.1 inches (15.5 centimeters) tall and 4.4 inches (11.2 centimeters) wide. Elaborately decorated stirrups have been found in Scandinavia, including a pair decorated with inlaid copper and silver wire.¹⁴⁷

Spurs used a simple straight prick in the early part of the Viking age. Later, they had an upturned prick.¹⁴⁸ The spurs that have been found in Iceland are of the straight type.¹⁴⁹

Horseshoes are not known to have been used until after the Viking age in Scandinavia,¹⁵⁰ although in winter, horses were shod with iron spikes for better traction, notably in order to draw sledges.¹⁵¹ Examples of such spikes are found in Iceland, which take the form of iron staples about 1 3/8 inches (36 millimeters) broad driven into the horse's hooves. A point about 3/8 inches (1 centimeter) long on the flat of the staple digs into snow and ice to provide traction.¹⁵²

Saddles are rarely found but were probably made from wood and leather. The remains of a saddle were found in the Oseberg ship burial and consisted of two wooden saddle panels which rested on the ribs on either side of the horse's spine, with a high pommel in front of the seat.¹⁵³ The saddle had mount-



Viking-age horses resembled modern Icelandic horses. The breed is small, sturdy, strong, and willing. Icelandic horses are capable of a fifth gait, called *tölt*, which allows them to cover ground at a fast pace that is comfortable for extended periods for horse and rider (author photograph).

ing holes thought to be for a ring, which could be used for securing cargo or for ponying another horse. The saddle is 18 inches (47 centimeters) from front to back. Some saddle remains found in Iceland had evidence of having been decorated with bronze bosses.¹⁵⁴

The author of *Fljótsdæla saga* comments that in saga days, men rode in enameled saddles that had high pommels.¹⁵⁵ That language also supports the use of high cantles (the back of the saddle) as well, which is the kind of saddle shown in use on the Bayeux tapestry. It is thought that saddles were placed far forward on the horse's back,¹⁵⁶ nearly in contact with the neck, which is how they are shown on the tapestry. When using a saddle of this type, the rider stretched his legs in front of him as he rode.¹⁵⁷

Young Snorri Þorgrímsson, wanting to appear to be of very modest means, rode a mare with an old *trogsöðul*, which translates to "trough-saddle."¹⁵⁸ Its nature is not known.

Pack saddles were used, probably in the form of a simple wooden frame over the horse's back holding two open wooden framework boxes on either side. Pads made from turf, or woven roots of grasses, protected the animal's back. Similar pack saddles were in use up until modern times in Iceland, with capacities of 450–650 pounds (200–300 kilograms).

Roads tended to follow natural routes, avoiding marshy places and wetlands. Routes were found that bypassed obstacles or took advantage of natural

features. Placename evidence testifies that the Icelanders were not always successful in finding these routes. There are many places called *Ófæra*, meaning *impossible*; you can't get there from here.

For example, some fjords have such steep walls rising directly from the water that no flat land for travel exists. A trip around the fjord required negotiating narrow ledges on a steep cliff wall. Rockslides and uncertain footing made these trips treacherous. A misstep in bad weather, such as fog or snow, resulted in a fatal drop to the water.

The language distinguishes between a trail or path (*vegr*) and a road cut through a forest or other obstacle (*braut*).¹⁵⁹ Placename evidence suggest that roads were created in Iceland in early times, such as *Akbrautarholt* (sleigh road hill) in south Iceland.¹⁶⁰

Travel was nearly impossible across Iceland's extensive lava fields. The rough terrain chewed up feet and shoes and broke ankles and legs, so travel across lava fields was avoided. The lava field Berserkjahraun in west Iceland separated the farms of Styrr Þorgrímsson and his brother Vermundr, forcing a long detour around the lava. Styrr tricked a pair of berserks into building a trail through the lava field to connect the two farms, a difficult and back-breaking job.¹⁶¹

The desolate highland tundra-like heaths in the interior must have seemed an impenetrable barrier to the early settlers. Heaths were difficult enough to navigate in fine weather, but treacherous in fog or blowing snow or other conditions of reduced visibility. The sagas suggest that people didn't avoid the heaths, but used them with caution, since they were often the best available route.

Iceland's large glaciers created multiple barriers. Crossing the ice was a dangerous undertaking due to hidden crevasses and collapsing ice surfaces. Crossing the land below the glacier, such as along Iceland's south coast, was nearly as difficult due to the powerful glacial rivers which were unpredictable in their course, depth, and flow. Regardless, a regular route along Iceland's south coast existed, used for travel to the Alþing. Hrafnkell Freysgoði used this route from his home in the east. Sámr Bjarnason, who left at the same time, took the more northerly interior route, and arrived at Þingvellir before Hrafnkell and his party.¹⁶²

Where possible, travelers journeyed on routes behind the glacier, in the interior. These routes, even though they traversed desolate heaths, were preferable to the dangers of glacier travel and crossing the rivers below the glacier.

After burning Njáll Þorgeirsson and his family in their home, Flosi Þórðarson and the burners returned to Flosi's farm at Svínafell by way of the route behind the mountains, north of the glacier.¹⁶³

Meltwater from the glaciers creates powerful rivers and deep canyons with no safe crossing anywhere along their length, particularly in north and east Iceland. Jökulsá á Brú in east Iceland can not be forded anywhere along its 95



The saddles shown in the Bayeux tapestry have high cantles and pommels and are placed far forward on the horse's back. Viking people may have used similar saddles.

miles (150 kilometers) length. At least one bridge over the river existed at Brú. Sámr Bjarnason took advantage of this bridge when he rode to the Alþing to prosecute a case against Hrafnkell Freysgoði.¹⁶⁴

A number of other bridges in Iceland are mentioned in the sagas. Some of these might seem to have been natural stone bridges, such as the bridge at Bjarnarfoss, across the Hvítá river in the west, which Illugi and Eysteinn Eiðsson used. The saga author says the bridge stood for a long time, but it likely had fallen by the time the saga was written.¹⁶⁵ A well-known folktale gives a different story, saying the natural stone bridge was intentionally destroyed after two children fell from the bridge into the maelstrom below and perished.¹⁶⁶

Other sources suggest that bridges in the saga age were all man-made, using timber.¹⁶⁷ Certainly the bridge that crossed the Øxará river in Þingvellir was a man-made structure. However, it's unlikely that Icelanders would ignore a convenient natural bridge where one existed.

Icelanders probably had some kind of bridge-building program.¹⁶⁸ Laws existed concerning the construction of a bridge, and what terms the bridge owner may impose on those who use his bridge.¹⁶⁹ Laws also existed concerning the upkeep of bridges. Whoever was responsible for a bridge was required to maintain it and keep it from dilapidation or face fines or lesser outlawry.¹⁷⁰

In other Viking lands, powerful central authorities made it possible to create massive public works, such as the bridge built at Ravning Enge in Denmark around the year 979. It was built using wooden piles driven down into solid

ground below the water, braced with wood and spanned with wooden planks. The bridge was about a half mile (700 meters) long and was supported on more than 1000 piles driven into the ground.¹⁷¹

It's unlikely that projects of that magnitude were attempted in Iceland. More likely, people took advantage of natural stone bridges where possible, built bridges where practical, and used ferries where needed. Ferries are mentioned frequently in the sagas.

Kaldaðarnes (caller's ness) was the farm where one called for a ferry across the Ölfusá river in south Iceland. Documents from after the close of saga age list the duties of the ferrymen. A boat and a small cargo vessel were available. Charges were applied to certain kinds of cargo, but passengers were carried for no charge.¹⁷²

Ferries were used not only for crossing rivers, but also for travel along the coast and to off-shore islands. Oddr Ófeigsson bought a ferry and operated it for several summers between Miðfjörðr in the north and Strandir in the west, along the coast of Húnaflói bay. With his profits, he later bought an ocean-going ship for foreign trade.¹⁷³

Finding one's way while traveling overland was not always particularly easy, even in the best of weather. One has the sense that it was best to travel with someone who already knew the way. Þórðr hreða (menace) stopped at the farm at Engihlíð while riding north to Kolbeinsáróss to meet a ship. Þorvaldr, the farmer at Engihlíð, offered to send his son Einarr with Þórðr, because Þórðr didn't know the way, an offer that was accepted with thanks.¹⁷⁴

Svartr, a stranger in Vatnsdalr, stopped at Ingólfr Þorsteinsson's farm at Hof. Ingólfr, rightfully suspicious of Svartr, refused him any help, but did walk back to the path with Svartr to show him the way to the next farm.¹⁷⁵

Finding one's way was such a fundamental ability that it was required by law of all Alþing attendees.¹⁷⁶

It's not likely that any navigational aids were used for land travel in the saga age. Compasses were unknown, and the sundials and sunstones mentioned in later sagas seem highly unlikely.

One wonders if, in desolate areas, travelers built cairns (*varða*), piles of stones to mark the trail. Old cairns mark many interior routes in Iceland. Although little evidence from the stories or other sources suggests they were used in the saga age, their use seems likely.

In both settled and unsettled regions, people used prominent, easily-recognized landmarks as navigational aids. For example, the three peaks of the mountain Þríhryningr in the south can be seen over a wide area, including the inhabited areas of Rangárvellir, Landeyjar, and much of Fljótshlíð, as well as along the tracks in the uninhabited regions behind the mountain. Its distinctive shape provided an unmistakable landmark for travelers. In addition, the relationship between the three peaks as seen by the traveler gave a good sense of where he was in relationship to the mountain.

In describing direction, the Norse people used the four cardinal points of the compass: north, south, east, and west. Their usage, however, was much more flexible than that to which a modern saga reader is accustomed, an aspect which can be confusing.

When speaking of directions within Iceland, the four cardinal points tended to refer to the quarter of the country. A person from the West Fjords leaving Alþing to travel home might say he was heading west, meaning to the West Quarter, when in fact, his travel direction was nearly due north.

On-board ship, east and west referred to directions corresponding to increasing longitude, and decreasing longitude, respectively, regardless of how much north and south travel was also involved. The East Settlement and West Settlement are both on the southwest coast of Greenland, yet a journey from the East to the West Settlement requires sailing in a direction much closer to north than to west.

When referring to lands outside of Iceland in the sagas, the four cardinal points tend to refer to direction from Norway. An Easterner was someone from lands to the east of Norway, including Sweden and the area now within Russia. A man from the south was from continental Europe. A man from the west was most commonly from Ireland. *Vestmannaeyjar* (Islands of the West Men) off the south coast of Iceland got its name from the Irish slaves who came to Iceland with Hjörleifr Hróðmarsson, one of the first settlers. The slaves revolted and killed Hjörleifr and his entire party. The slaves then fled to these islands off the coast. Ingólfr Arnarson tracked them down and killed them, and so the islands were named for the West men, the Irish slaves.¹⁷⁷

As important aspect of land travel in Norse lands was the giving of hospitality. A traveler expected the door of even the most modest farm to be opened to him for warmth, for food and drink, and for overnight shelter.

Geirriðr built her house across the road at Borgardalr in Álptafjörðr so that travelers were forced to pass through her house and receive an offer of hospitality. Food was left on the table which all were welcome to share. She was considered a very generous woman.¹⁷⁸

The generous offering of hospitality was admired. A place on the bench in the hall of the longhouse was found for an arriving traveler. Naturally, travelers would prefer to stay with family members or political allies, but if that weren't possible, they would turn to whatever farmhouse might be at hand. *Hávamál* teaches that one should offer hospitality, but in moderation.¹⁷⁹

It was considered good manners for a guest to stay no more than three days. When Einarr Helgason visited Egill Skalla-Grímson's farm at Borg to give him a gift of a shield, Egill was not at home. Einarr stayed the customary three days and then left, leaving the shield behind.¹⁸⁰

Hávamál, too, says that a guest must not remain in the same place. The poem teaches that a guest becomes loathed if he sits too long in someone else's hall.¹⁸¹

Stories from the sagas suggest that hospitality was not always forthcoming. Perhaps the most egregious example is found in *Egils saga*. Egill Skallagrímsson repaid his host for the shabby hospitality by gouging out one of his host's eyes and cutting off his beard before departing in the morning.¹⁸²

Eyrbyggja saga tells of Þórgunna, a Christian woman from the Hebrides who settled in Iceland. She grew ill and saw that her end was near. She asked to be buried at the church at Skálholt, which would later become the seat of the first Icelandic bishop. After she died, her body was wrapped, placed in a coffin, and put on the back of a pack-horse for the long overland journey to Skálholt.

In sleet and rain, the party decided to stop for the night, rather than try to cross the Hvítá river in the dark. They asked for hospitality at the farm there, but the farmer refused.

The men unloaded their horses and went into the hall to spend the night, even though no food or other hospitality was offered. In the middle of the night, noises were heard coming from the pantry. Thinking that thieves had broken in to the house, people got up to look.

They were shocked by the sight of Þórgunna, completely naked, preparing food. She brought it out to the hall, laid it on the table, and served it to the travelers. She warned the farmer of trouble if he didn't offer better hospitality in future. The farmer and his wife rushed to help the travelers out of their wet clothes and offered them dry clothes. Lamps were lit, and all sat down to the meal prepared by the ghost. Þórgunna walked out of the hall and wasn't seen again.¹⁸³

A reader of the sagas who tries to follow the location of the action in a story using a modern map of Iceland is likely to be confused. Events take place at widely scattered locations, and in improbable locations when viewed on a modern map.

The locations make more sense when one realizes that the routes available to travelers in the saga age often have little to do with modern roads, nor were routes necessarily the shortest distance between two points. Low, wet areas were avoided in favor of higher, drier routes. Natural barriers forced travelers far out of their way. As an example, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, many events take place well upriver on the Eystri-Rangá, near the farm of Keldur, far from any of the well-traveled roads in modern times. The reason is that the ford over the river in the saga age was located near there. Travelers from the settled areas in Fljótshlíð or Landeyjar would have had to travel to that ford to go west or north. Thus, anyone plotting an ambush would know that the people they sought would have to use that ford.

Time Keeping

The saga-age Icelanders used the same methods of reckoning the time and day as were used in the other Viking lands. Language evidence, such as the

names of the days of the weeks, suggests that the system of reckoning is much older than the settlement, so it's likely the Icelanders brought this system with them from their homelands.¹⁸⁴

The Icelanders realized that the calendar they were using was slipping relative to the astronomical year, so around the year 960, they instituted a calendar reform.¹⁸⁵ One might wonder how Icelanders, without any observational instruments, were able to so accurately reckon time and date.

The apparent motion of the sun at high latitudes made time keeping without mechanical aids simpler than might at first be apparent to someone from the lower latitudes. At high latitudes, the sun never rises very high in the sky, and so it is relatively easy to compare the position of the sun relative to natural features on the landscape, such as a mountain, in order to estimate the time of day. In addition, the position of the sun at sunrise and sunset relative to natural features changes very rapidly, day by day. Around the time of the equinoxes, the position of the sun on the horizon changes by about one degree per day in Iceland, about twice the diameter of the sun. At that rate, it's not hard to observe visually that the calendar is out of sync with the motion of the sun, when, on a particular day, the sun rises several diameters to one side or other from where it's supposed to rise.

Having an accurate calendar was at least as important in Iceland as in any agricultural land so that farmers knew when to plant, when to harvest, and when to let the rams and ewes come together in winter. All of these had to be carefully timed to take best advantage of the short Icelandic summer.

Saga-age Icelanders had additional reasons for keeping accurate counts of the days. The annual Alþing assembly opened on the Thursday of the tenth week after the beginning of summer. People from all over Iceland traveled to Þingvellir to attend the event, some of whom traveled for many days or even weeks to get to the site. Since there was a fine imposed on chieftains for arriving late, and a possible loss of their office,¹⁸⁶ keeping track of the date was critical to powerful and wealthy men all across Iceland.

As in the other northern lands, saga-age Icelanders divided the year into two parts: *sumar* (summer), a time of daylight and production; and *vetr* (winter), a period of darkness and consumption. The first day of summer, which occurred in April, was a time of joyous celebration, and it remains so in modern Iceland.

Many events were reckoned by the season. People's ages were counted in the number of winters they had survived. *Fljótsdæla saga* says that Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson were twelve and ten winters old when they left their home one night in order to kill Þorgrímr tordýfill (dung beetle) for his slander.¹⁸⁷

The year was further divided into twelve months (*mánuðr*), each thirty days long. Four extra days called *aukanætr* were inserted in mid-summer to bring the total number of days in the calendar year to 364.¹⁸⁸ The names of the

months reflected the activities one might expect to perform during those months: *heyannir* (hay making time), *stekktíð* (lamb fold time), *gormánuður* (slaughtering month), *kornskurðarmánuður* (grain harvest month). Snorri Sturluson enumerates the names of the months in *Skáldskaparmál*.¹⁸⁹

The year was further divided into 52 weeks, each 7 days long, totaling 364 days. A *sumarauki* (leap-week) was inserted every seventh summer, with some additional adjustments, to keep the 364 day calendar year and 365.24 day astronomical year more closely in sync.¹⁹⁰ The days of the week were named for Norse gods, such as *Þórsdagur* (Thor's day, which became Thursday in modern English), as well as for activities, such as *Laugardagr* (wash day).

The week was often the unit by which important dates in Icelandic society were measured. Alþing convened on the Thursday of the tenth week after the first day of summer. *Fardagar* (Moving Days), the days on which people were legally permitted to move their domicile, were Thursday through Sunday of the sixth week of summer.¹⁹¹

It's not clear how people kept track of the days. In other Scandinavian lands, marked wooden staves were used as calendars from the Viking age into the 17th century,¹⁹² and it's quite likely that Icelanders used them as well.

As was the year, the day was split into two parts. Each day had two *dægr* (half-days). *Sólarhringur*, a complete cycle of the sun through the sky, was divided into *dagur* (day) and *nótt* (night). The twenty-four hour period was split into eight equal intervals called *eyktir*.

The intervals were named for what they were, such as *hádegi* (high-day: noon), and in some cases for the activity that took place at that time, such as *dagmál* (morning meal) or *rismál* (wake-up time).

Time keeping was performed by comparing the location of the sun to landmarks on the horizon, easy to do in the high latitudes where the sun never rises very high in the sky. Some landmarks in Iceland were given names that reflect their use in time keeping, and many farms had landmarks called *eyktmörk* that picked out the eight *eyktir* of the day.¹⁹³ For example, at *nón* (mid-afternoon), the sun as seen from the farm at Árnes in west Iceland was over the mountain *Nónhyrna* (nón peak). Time keeping and direction finding were interlinked.

Time keeping in saga-age Iceland was ego-centric. The time was *nón* for a farmer because from his homefield, the sun was over Nónhyrna. The time was *náttmál* because the family was eating their evening meal. *Miðdegi* at one farm might well be a different time of day from *miðdegi* at another farm.

Date keeping, in contrast, was universal. People at opposite ends of the country had to know the date so they could all converge on Þingvellir on the same day for the annual assembly. Great pains were taken to keep a calendar that was uniform across the land and that corresponded with the astronomical calendar, so that festivals and feasts and gatherings could be planned, and so that farmers could plant crops and take advantage of animal fecundity to optimize the farm's productivity.

Stjörnu-Oddi Helgason's charts and the Vínland explorers' observations described earlier in this chapter attest to the saga-age Icelanders awareness of and interest in the apparent motion of the sun as a way to fix location, time, and date.

CHAPTER 10

Art and Leisure

Literature

LANGUAGE

Icelanders of the saga age spoke what they called the *dönsk tunga* (the Danish tongue), also called *norræn tunga* (Nordic tongue) and *Norraena* (Norse) in the medieval written sources.¹ Today, this early language is often called Common Scandinavian,² or less accurately, old Norse. It is part of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages. The modern Scandinavian languages, including modern Icelandic, derive from this branch, as do modern German and English.

In the centuries just before the Viking age, major changes took place in the Germanic languages. These changes separated Common Scandinavian from the other Germanic languages. The changes in the Scandinavian language are extraordinary in that they seemed to have been adopted, with few exceptions, across all the Norse lands, despite the lack of any central authority in these northern lands. Perhaps the changes were spread from the major trading centers in Scandinavia.³

One must be careful when discussing the uniformity of this early language, however. The available sources are very sparse, consisting primarily of runic inscriptions on objects such as memorial stones. Yet the slight evidence suggests a remarkable uniformity across the northern lands.

By the beginning of the Viking age, the rate of change in the Norse language had slowed. The language remained sufficiently uniform across all the Viking lands that Norse people could communicate among themselves without difficulty. From the Baltic lands to Greenland, language was no barrier to communications. The author of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* says that in the time of King Aðalráður Játgeirsson (Æthelred the Unready) at the end of the 10th century, the language spoken in England was the same as that spoken in Norway and Denmark.⁴

Language was used to identify and distinguish people. The Icelandic law codes provided for different laws for those who spoke the Norse language than

for those who did not. For example, inheritance laws were different for Norse speakers than for “others.”⁵

By the end of the Viking age, the Scandinavian language had split into two dialects: East Norse (Sweden and Denmark); and West Norse (Norway and the North Atlantic settlements, including Iceland).⁶

Within Iceland, differences in language from one region to another are thought to have been very slight, in large part due to the extensive travel and movement within the country: to the Alþing, to fishing stations, to trade centers, and to family members who lived in different districts.⁷

Ironically, Iceland’s conversion to Christianity was the single greatest factor in preserving records of pagan Scandinavian culture and of saga-age Iceland. Most written documentation about the world of the Vikings was compiled in Christian Iceland during the 12th to the 14th centuries.

By this time, the Scandinavian languages had begun to diverge, and the medieval Icelanders wrote in the language now called old Icelandic. Without this medieval Icelandic literature, we would know very little about Viking-age history, society, or mythology. Not only does this medieval literature endure as a vital part of Icelandic culture today, but it also has had a broad impact on Western culture outside of Scandinavia. Neither Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* nor J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* would have been possible were it not for the writings of the medieval Icelanders.

RUNIC WRITING

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the runic alphabet was widely known in Scandinavia, and evidence suggests that literacy was wide-spread. Highly public memorial stones with runic inscriptions are found in many Viking lands, notably Sweden. Why erect them if most of the population couldn’t read them?

More evidence for literacy comes from writing tablets showing traces of runic writing, which are found, not in trading towns, but in remote Scandinavian farms.⁸ The tablets consisted of a wooden frame with raised borders that held wax. Runic characters were inscribed into the wax with a sharp iron stylus.

Tally sticks with runic writing are found in trading centers, meant to be attached to merchandise.⁹ Everyday objects are found inscribed with the owner’s name and other short messages.

Additionally, saga evidence suggests literacy was common. In an episode related in *Morkinskinna*, the saga author found it not the least bit remarkable that a poor unnamed Icelander was able to read a runic inscription carved into a buried treasure chest.¹⁰

POETRY

Despite the widespread knowledge of runic writing, Scandinavian culture

was almost entirely oral prior to the arrival of Christianity. The longest surviving runic inscriptions are about the length of a stanza of poetry. The Norse people had all the tools in place for creating longer written works, but for unknown reasons, they chose not to. Instead, important thoughts were remembered through poetry, which was transmitted orally.

Poets were held in high regard, not only for their ability to improvise poetic entertainment, but also because they were the repository of the shared cultural experience. Poetry was the vessel through which Norse culture was passed from generation to generation. Once committed to poetry, a thought was expected to last as long as there were people to remember it.¹¹

Poets were the journalists, the historians, the reference librarians, and the entertainers of the saga age. Poets packaged thoughts and ideas into poetry that could be more easily remembered and recited in a culture that chose not to use writing.

By the saga age, Icelanders already had a high reputation as poets. Icelanders were often chosen to be the court poets in Norway. Kings placed their poets in positions where they could observe important events, so that eyewitness news of these events would be circulated.

Before the battle at Stiklarstaðir in Norway, King Óláfr inn helgi (the holy) arranged his men in battle formation. He chose the strongest and most valiant warriors to form a *skjaldborg* (shield castle) in which a solid mass of shields protected the men inside. The king ordered his poets into the *skjaldborg* so that they could observe the battle first-hand and compose poetry about it. Through their poetry, news of the battle would be disseminated throughout the Viking lands.¹²

The poets that entered the *skjaldborg* were Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld (poet of Coal-brows), Gizurr gullbrá (gold brow), and Þorfinnr munnr (mouth), all Icelandic poets. The sagas incorporate a substantial body of poetry by Icelanders, suggesting that they were indeed prolific poets during the saga age.

Iceland had a vibrant oral culture. Tales, both mythological and contemporary, as well as histories, genealogies, and law codes were created and preserved in verse form and transmitted orally.¹³

Medieval Icelandic verse falls into two broad categories: *eddic* poetry and *skaldic* poetry. Eddic poetry uses simple verse forms created by anonymous poets, telling stories of heroes and gods, or offering advice on proper behavior. It is exemplified by the poems of the *Poetic Edda*, a collection preserved in the manuscript *Codex Regius* (GKS 2365 4to). The book is a carefully grouped set of twenty-nine poems which provide advice and tell of mythical tales and legendary adventures. The manuscript was written in Iceland around the year 1270, but the poems are clearly based on much older material. The poems deal with a wide range of material, from various sources, in various meters, for various audiences, but they seem to represent authentic folk material deriving from early Viking and Germanic oral traditions.¹⁴

In the following typical eddic stanza from *Fáfnismál* (The Lay of Fáfnir), the dragon Fáfnir had been struck his death-blow by Sigurðr, and the dragon warned the hero of his impending doom:

I advise you now, Sigurðr, and you should take the advice,
and ride away home from here!
The ringing gold, and the red-glowing treasure,
the rings will be your death.¹⁵

The nature of the text and marginal notes in the manuscript for some of the poems strongly suggest that the poetry was meant to be performed by “actors” who spoke directly to the audience while in character.¹⁶ For example, *Skírnismál* uses a wide range of dramatic techniques, including soliloquies and asides to the audience.¹⁷

The *Codex Regius* manuscript is small and uses the leaves with great efficiency. It is void of embellishments such as the illuminations used for the stories and histories contained within *Flateyrbók* (GKS 1005 folio), suggesting that the people of the time thought these poems to be of lesser importance.¹⁸

In contrast to eddic poetry, skaldic or court poetry tells about contemporary people and events; the poems are verses about Vikings composed by Vikings.¹⁹ The poems commemorate major events, record emotions, and offer praise for kings and others from whom the poet might hope for recompense.

Snorri Sturluson, a 13th century Icelandic poet, historian, scholar, and chieftain, considered ancient skaldic poetry to be a reliable historical source. In the foreword to *Heimskringla*, his history of the Norwegian kings, Snorri says that he gathered most of the historical information for his book from skaldic verses.

King Harald had poets with him, and men today still know their poems, and the poems about all the kings of Norway then and since. And we have set great store by what is said in these poems, which were recited in front of the kings themselves or their sons. We have taken as true everything that one finds in those poems about their expeditions and battles.²⁰

Snorri adds that while poets wanted to offer the highest praise to their chieftains, none would have dared to exaggerate or fabricate in verse, since that would be taken as mockery, not as praise.

Skaldic poetry is usually attributed to named poets (*skáld*). About five thousand verses survive, typically as verses quoted in other works, such as the sagas and the *Snorra Edda*, Snorri Sturluson’s treatise on Norse poetry and mythology. In the book, several hundred poets are named and their verse quoted.²¹ Most of the named poets are Icelanders.

Skaldic poetry was considered to be the highest form of art, a gift from Óðinn, the highest of the gods. The poems use extremely difficult meters and complex, ornate diction.²² Word order is altered significantly, which was pos-

sible in a highly inflected language such as Icelandic and its ancient predecessors.

An inflected language changes the form of a word depending on how the word is used in a sentence. For example, the subject, object, and indirect object of the sentence are clear in Icelandic regardless of their order in the sentence due to their inflection.

Since the importance of word order is diminished, it was possible for the poet to express two or three clauses simultaneously in the verse.²³ The tortuous syntax also served to meet the complex metrical requirements of the verse and additionally elevated the art of the poem. During delivery, the verses may have been marked by alterations in pitch or volume to help the listener keep track of the discontinuous syntax.²⁴

Skaldic poetry is distinguished by its extensive use of *kennings*, poetic paraphrases such as *steed of the waves* to stand for the word *ship*. Many of these kennings have their roots in the mythological and heroic poetry, so skaldic poets and their audiences needed to be well versed in Norse mythology. For example, *flame of the Rhine* meant *gold*, but the phrase would be meaningless to someone who didn't know the story of how the gold of the Völsungar ended up at the bottom of the Rhine.

Kennings could be several layers deep, with words in a kenning replaced by yet another kenning. For example, in the kenning *flame of the sea-steed's path*: *sea-steed* means *ship*; *ship's path* means *water*; and *flame of water* means *gold*.²⁵

All of these features can be found in the verses of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, a renowned Icelandic Viking, warrior, brawler, and poet, whose story is told in *Egils saga*. Egill and his brother Þórólfr fought in the battle of Vinheiðr while in the service of King Aðalsteinn of England. Þórólfr died a meaningless death in the battle, in part thanks to a military blunder by Aðalsteinn. Egill survived and brought the battle to a victorious conclusion.

Following the battle, at the victory feast in the king's hall, Egill and Aðalsteinn sat across from one another, on opposite sides of the fire. Egill, grief-stricken and angry, remained fully armed, glaring silently at the king from under his swarthy brows, refusing to join in the revelry. He repeatedly pulled his sword part-way out of its scabbard, then slammed it back in.

To defuse the situation, the king removed a golden ring from his arm, placed it on the point of his sword, and offered it to Egill across the fire. Egill took the ring on the end of his sword and put it on his arm. Mollified by the king's gift and the respect it signified, Egill joined in the feast by taking up the drinking horn and speaking this verse:

Hrammtangar lætr hanga
hrynvirgil mér brynju
Höðr á hauki troðnum
heiðis vingameiði;
rítmœðis knák reiða

ræðr gunnvala bræðir
gelgu seil á galga
geirveðrs, lofi at meira.²⁶

The verse form is *dróttkvætt* (heroic meter), commonly used in skaldic poetry. Each stanza has eight lines, and each line has six syllables, three of them stressed. The lines are linked in alliterating pairs: two words in the odd lines alliterate with one word in the even lines. All lines have internal rhyme or consonance. In the first two lines, the syllables *hramm*, *hang*, and *hryn* alliterate, with rhyme in the syllables *tang* and *hang*, *hryn* and *bryn*.

A direct translation might read:

Of-the-hand causes to-hang
ringing-snare to-me of-the-mailcoat
Höðr on the hawk-trodden
hawk's swinging-pole;
of-the-shield-vexer I do brandish
arranges of-battle-hawks the feeder
of-the-staff cord on the gallows
of the spear-storm, glory for greater.

The first step in the interpretation of skaldic verse is to untangle the word order. The stanza can be organized as:

Höðr brynju lætr hanga hrynvirgil hrammtangar mér á hauki troðnum vingameiði
heiðis;
Knák reiða seil gelgu rítmæðis á galga geirveðrs; gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira
lofi.

Applying the same organization to the English translation:

Höðr of the mailcoat causes the ringing snare of the hand to hang on my hawk-trodden swinging-pole (i.e. gallows) of the hawk.
I do brandish the cord of the staff of the shield-vexer on the gallows of the spear-storm;
the feeder of the battle-hawks arranges for greater glory.

The next step is to solve the kennings, which are italicized above. To unravel these puzzles, one needs to be very familiar with Norse mythology. For example, Höðr is one of the Norse gods, so the god of the mailcoat is a warrior. Hence:

The warrior causes the metallic arm-ring to hang on my hawk-trodden arm (i.e. where a nobleman's hawk sits). I do brandish the arm-ring (shield-vexer=sword; staff of the shield vexer=arm that supports the sword) on the sword (spear-storm=battle); the warrior (who feeds carrion birds) arranges for greater glory.

In simple prose, Egill accepts the gift proffered by the king on his sword, along with the honor it signifies.

Skaldic poetry is so complex that it may have taken some time to sort out a verse. Could a listener have unraveled the complex wordplay on the fly? In many cases in the sagas, the listeners appear to understand the meaning as the poem is recited. In others, some later careful thought and reflection was required.

In *Gísla saga*, Þórdís Súrsdóttir heard her brother Gísli recite a verse. Þórdís went home, pondered the verse, then came to the realization that Gísli was taking credit for his having killed Þórdís's husband.²⁷

Similarly, in *Grettis saga*, Spes and her servants were out walking in Byzantium when they heard the beautiful voice of Þorsteinn Ásmundarson. He was imprisoned in a dungeon and was chanting to keep up his spirits. Spes asked why he was imprisoned. Þorsteinn explained that he had killed to avenge his brother Grettir's death, and he praised Grettir in a verse. Those in Spes's party who understood the verse added their admiration for Grettir, but the saga text suggests that many in the group were not able to understand the complexities of Þorsteinn's verse on the spot.²⁸

Skaldic poetry features prominently in some of the sagas. Indeed, some of the sagas center on characters who might best be described as warrior-poets. The art of war and the art of poetry were thought to be intertwined; both were gifts from Óðinn, the highest of the gods. Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in reviewing his life in his poem "Sonatorrek," praised Óðinn for his gifts: the gift of poetry, and the gift of being able to discern his true enemies.²⁹

Unlike the verses in the histories, such as *Heimskringla*, which serve to authenticate a historical event, the verses in the *Sagas of Icelanders* usually have a different purpose, and thus are regarded today with skepticism. Are they historical verses created by the poet to whom they're attributed in the saga? Or are they verses created by the saga author at the same time he composed the prose?³⁰ Arguments have been advanced on both sides, and the best answer seems to be that there may be some of each, even within the same saga.

Either way, it would be easy to skip over the verses, especially when reading English translations, where the clever wordplay and elegant diction in the original are largely erased by the translator's need to make the meaning of the verse comprehensible. That omission by the reader would be a mistake.

The verses were placed there by the saga authors for several good reasons. For one, they reveal the mental and emotional state of a character in a way that would be inappropriate for, or at least, less sensitively handled in prose. By using prose and poetry together, the author tells a story with nuances that neither form alone can achieve satisfactorily.³¹

Additionally, some of the poems have entertainment value that makes struggling through the verses more than worth the effort. As an example, some rivals in the sagas battle using verse, fighting with words, rather than weapons. In *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa*, Björn Hítðlakappi and Þórðr Kolbeinsson both sought the affection and the hand of Oddný Þorkelsdóttir. Their taunts, insults, and gibes, expressed in verse, are cruel, but clever, inventive, and on the mark, making for humorous reading.

When a settlement was finally arranged between the two, Þórðr wondered aloud whether he and Björn had composed a similar number of scandalous verses. To find out, they each recited their verses, only some of which were fit

to hear, according to the saga author. It turned out Þórðr had composed one fewer insulting verse than had Björn. Þórðr remedied the situation on the spot, and Björn took the newly composed insulting verse to mean that Þórðr was not truly interested in peace. The settlement was abandoned.³²

SAGAS

With the conversion to Christianity in the 11th century, Iceland was introduced to a book-based culture. The Icelanders were quick to exploit the new means of preserving the story of their land and people. Texts written with pen and ink on vellum by educated people could be read by other educated people as an alternate and more precise way to preserve and transmit important thoughts. The first named Icelandic author was Sæmundr enn fróði (the wise) Sigfússon, who wrote several historical works in Latin at the beginning of the 12th century, none of which have survived.

In contrast with other parts of Europe, where vernacular literature took centuries to develop, the Icelanders were writing extensively in their native tongue within decades of their first works in Latin. They adapted the Roman alphabet to meet the requirements of the Icelandic language, adding additional letters such as þ (thorn) to represent sounds in the northern language. Prominent families sent their sons abroad for education very quickly after the conversion, realizing the value of having a priest in the family. Bishop Ísleifr Gizurarson began educating young Icelanders at Skálholt in the later part of the 11th century.³³

As early as 1117, the Alþing called for Iceland's laws to be written down, a process that began the following winter.³⁴ Around the year 1130, Ari enn fróði (the wise) Þorgilsson produced a history of Iceland, *Íslendingabók*. He was the first named Icelandic author to write in the vernacular.³⁵ *Landnámabók*, the other major text on the settlements, was composed at about the same time. Starting in the middle of the 12th century, a series of grammatical treatises were written to teach writing, use of language, and composition to Icelandic students without having to resort to Latin texts.³⁶ By the 1200s, Icelandic authors were producing a torrent of works in Icelandic, in contrast with the rest of Europe, where Latin remained the dominant language of the literate.

Iceland's uniquely developed vernacular literature remains the subject of lively discussion and debate. It has been suggested that Icelanders did not use Latin because they weren't proficient in the language.³⁷ Multiple causes were doubtless at play. Iceland was unique among European countries in having a population comprised of a large number of free, land-owning farmers. Many of these men were educated, and some were ordained priests.³⁸ They wanted and commissioned books in their own language, not Latin. Additionally, the oral literary traditions of the Icelanders also favored writings in the vernacular. Many of the early vernacular writings are preoccupied with matters of land-settlement, genealogy, or history, matters that had material bearing on the economic, legal, and social standing of contemporary Icelanders.

European literature was translated into Icelandic, including stories of the lives of saints, and learned books on topics including astronomy, natural history, and geography. Romances from the courts of Europe were translated, such as *Tristrams saga og Ísondar*. Travel books were written by Icelandic visitors to Europe.

Vernacular Icelandic literature also included a substantial body of material about broader Scandinavian history. Histories written in Iceland, such as Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, are among our most important surviving records of Nordic history during the Viking age. Another group of histories cover contemporary events, such as the sagas of bishops, and the *Sturlunga saga*, a compilation that describes the events in Iceland during the turbulent 12th and 13th centuries. Other prose writings deal with mythological and legendary subjects inherited from the pagan Viking tradition, such as Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, composed over an extended period beginning around the year 1220, and the *Völsunga saga*, from later in the century.

Most memorable of all are the medieval Icelanders' stories about their Viking-age ancestors, known as the *Íslendingasögur* (*Sagas of Icelanders*), sometimes called the family sagas. The stories of the sagas take place in the 9th to 11th centuries, the period called the saga age. They remain compelling and entertaining reading today.

The first family sagas appeared in the early part of the 13th century. They flourished at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century. By the beginning of the 15th century, saga writing had declined and few additional stories of this form were written.³⁹

By the time the sagas came to be written, Iceland had weathered a turbulent period in her history, with a long period of bloodshed followed by the collapse of the free-state and the loss of independence. Some readers see the sagas as a wistful look back at the golden age of settlement and commonwealth from the turbulent period of the Sturlunga age and its aftermath.

About forty sagas survive, along with a number of shorter prose narratives called *páttir*. The stories survive today in vellum manuscripts from approximately the 14th through the 16th century, as well as on later paper copies.⁴⁰ Although the printing press arrived in Iceland in the 1530s,⁴¹ its use was reserved for church materials; secular materials continued to be hand-copied.

The sagas feature farmers, chieftains, and slaves; husbands, wives, and rivals; friendships, hatreds, and conflicting loyalties; adventure, humor, and tragedy. Some of them follow families for generation after generation, beginning with their emigration from Norway. They are distinctive among medieval literatures in telling heroic tales not about heroes, but about typical Icelanders of the settlement and commonwealth period, offering compelling images of life in saga-age Iceland.

The stories are narrated in a sparse, objective style. The author writes in the third person and rarely tells the reader anything that could not be observed

by a witness. Internal thoughts and emotions are communicated by behavior and dialog. The author rarely intrudes on the narrative and rarely judges characters or events. Instead, events and dialog are dryly reported as if being read into the historical record. Judgment is conveyed through the action and dialog of third parties in the story.

For example, Egill Skalla-Grímsson was a young lad when he killed another boy in return for some rough treatment and humiliation in a ball game. The saga author reports the killing in a completely neutral tone: "Egill ran to Grímur and drove the axe into his head, right into the brain."⁴²

The reaction of Egill's mother tells us how this action was judged. She was clearly pleased with her son's initiative and awareness of the need to maintain honor. The saga author dryly notes: "Bera said he has the makings of a Viking."⁴³

The authors of the sagas are all anonymous. The manuscripts do not list the authors, or even the titles. The only saga whose author has been identified with even the slightest degree of certainty is *Egils saga*, thought by Sigurður Nordal to have been written by Snorri Sturluson,⁴⁴ who is known to have authored other significant books in the 13th century.

While some saga authors were content merely to report the story, other authors were clearly more skilled at using literary devices to enhance the reader's experience. Some authors masterfully controlled the pacing of the story, building tension and releasing it as needed to control the reader's emotional involvement.⁴⁵ Cross-cutting, commonly used to build suspense in modern feature films, was also used for the same purposes in the sagas, where the narrative first focused on one group of antagonists, then jumped to focus on their opponents, and then back again, until the two sides met in conflict. An example is Þorbjörn öngull's attack on Grettir Ásmundarson, where the author jumps back and forth between descriptions of Grettir's debilitating injuries and Þorbjörn's advance and attack on Grettir's island hideaway at Drangey.⁴⁶

Many sagas are composed as interwoven strands of narrative. Story and characters are developed only to be dropped and picked up later in the saga to be interwoven with other strands of the story.⁴⁷ Chapters 24–28 of *Grettis saga* have five plot lines being developed simultaneously.⁴⁸

Authors foreshadow coming events through the use of dialog spoken by third parties, notably about their dreams, which were thought to give warning of future events, and through other supernatural events. Gísli Súrsson told his wife Auðr Vésteinsdóttir of his dreams, terrifying visions that foretold his death.⁴⁹

The appearance and clothing of major characters are often described in great detail, which served to give the readers clues about characters' attributes and their status in society. Fine, brightly-colored clothing and prestigious weapons signified wealth, status, and power. Clothing could also be used to foreshadow. The wearing of black (*blár*) clothing in the sagas signifies that the wearer is about to kill someone.

Some characters are introduced with lengthy genealogies. These serve to draw the reader's attention to kinship relationships that will help the reader understand characters' behaviors later in the saga. Additionally, they suggest that the reader is receiving a truthful account of the lives of important historical people.⁵⁰

The sagas must be used with great care as a historical source. Centuries separated the authors from their subjects. Major changes had taken place in Icelandic culture and society during those centuries. The broad outlines of the stories may be based on actual events and historical characters, but the details are obscured by time and were certainly manipulated to suit the authors' literary needs.

Indeed, the literary sophistication of the stories is itself dangerous. It is easy to be seduced by the authors' highly believable characters, events, and settings.

The pendulum of acceptance has swung from one extreme to the other during the 20th century. At the beginning of the century, the tendency was to accept the sagas as truth. Archaeological reports confirmed the events of the sagas based on the flimsiest of evidence. By the end of the century, archaeologists prefaced their analyses saying that saga sources must be "set aside" because they are "irrelevant" to the archaeological study of the first part of the saga age.⁵¹

Nonetheless, there is clearly a considerable body of genuine historical information imbedded in these texts, and they remain one of the most important reference points for understanding not only the saga age in Iceland, but the broader Viking age of northern Europe.

How the sagas came to be written down remains the subject of controversy. Did an author select and combine and enhance existing oral tradition to create a new work, or did a scribe merely transcribe the oral tradition onto vellum? Are the sagas literary creations, or merely mechanical transcriptions? Good arguments on both sides of the question can be advanced.

In either case, the sagas are a serendipitous combination of scholastic learning from books with the Icelandic tradition of oral story telling.⁵² The Icelandic story-telling traditions blended with historiographical works from foreign sources to create a unique new literary form: the *Sagas of Icelanders*.⁵³

Over the centuries, the original manuscripts of the sagas were copied, transcribed, combined, interpolated, and edited. Material was deleted and new material written to bridge the gap. None of the surviving manuscripts represent the "original" version of the stories as set down by the first author. All the surviving manuscripts are copies, dating from well after the time the stories were first written down. Both early and late manuscripts survive for some sagas, and occasionally, the differences in the texts, the hands, and the illuminations are quite significant.

Art

The Viking people prized decorative art. Virtually every artifact found from the Viking age is highly decorated, even mundane, commonplace objects. Yet the Viking people apparently had little use for realistic pictorial art, since few such objects have been found. One of the few surviving examples was found in Sigtuna, Sweden and depicts the head of a man carved from the end of an elk antler.⁵⁴

The northern people apparently did not create art for art's sake. There are few examples of decorated objects having no purpose other than to display their ornamentation. Instead, Viking-age art is characterized by extraordinary ornamentation of everyday objects. Even the humblest objects are elaborately and unrestrainedly decorated.

Objects from saga-age Iceland are no different from those found in other Viking lands. Exceptional decoration seems to have been the rule.

A spearhead found in Kotmúli in south Iceland is decorated with twelve protruding nail heads and is inlaid with silver, copper, and niello (a black alloy of sulfur, copper, silver and lead).⁵⁵ Still striking today, its appearance when new and shiny one thousand years ago must have been stunning.

The sagas talk about artistic treasures now lost. Vésteinn Vésteinsson gave Gísli Súrsson and his wife Auðr Vésteinsdóttir a fabulous tapestry, 60 measures long.⁵⁶ The measure isn't specified, but if it meant ells, the tapestry would have been about 100 feet (30 meters) long, an extraordinary piece.

It is thought that these tapestries depicted scenes from Norse mythology. A surviving example was found in the Oseberg ship burial in Norway. Based on the weaving frame found in the same burial, it is thought that the tapestry could not have been much longer than 6.5 feet (2 meters) long.⁵⁷ It is 6 to 9 inches (16 to 23 centimeters) wide and decorated with scenes depicting men and women on foot and on horseback, accompanied by horse-drawn wagons. The images were created with colored wools using a variety of techniques.⁵⁸ The figures are outlined with *soumak*, in which colored yarns were wrapped around the warp threads during weaving. The outlines were later filled in with colored brocade.⁵⁹

Wooden objects were decorated with carvings. Óláfr pái (peacock) built a fabulous new house at Hjarðarholt in west Iceland, larger and grander than had been seen before. At a wedding feast in the new house, the poet Úlfr Uggason composed the poem *Húsdrápa* about the heroic tales carved into the wood of the hall.⁶⁰

The Oseberg ship burial is the source of some extraordinary examples of Viking-age wood carving. Five posts carved with animal heads were found, which are thought to have been cult objects. The detail and fine workmanship in the carvings, suggests a very skilled artist. Differences among the five examples suggest that several different artists made the various posts.⁶¹ The sledge

found in the same burial has elaborate carvings on every surface, along with four realistic carved human heads at the ends of the four posts.

Other forms of artistic endeavors include stone carving, such as that seen on the memorial

stones found in many Viking lands, notably Sweden, but not in Iceland. Weapons were frequently elaborately decorated with stampings and inlays. Bone and ivory artifacts were carved, such as the casket having sixteen carved walrus ivory panels found in Bamberg, Germany.⁶²

Jewelry in the Viking lands was typically elaborately decorated as well. Jewelry found in Iceland tends to be of lesser quality, both in the materials used and the quality of the workmanship, than that found in other Viking lands.⁶³

During the Viking era, various styles of artistic decoration were developed and applied to a wide variety of decorated items. It is customary to divide Viking-age art into six successive styles. A particular style lasted for a period of time, but was not immediately replaced by a new style. Rather, the two styles coexisted for a period of time.

It's remarkable how quickly new styles overspread the entire Norse sphere of influence. Clearly, communications between the various parts of the Viking world was excellent, and new artistic styles were carried from place to place and were readily adopted. It's thought that these new styles were disseminated from Viking trading towns.

The styles are named for the modern geographic area where important archaeological finds were made. They are:

Oseberg: This style was used during the first three-quarters of the 9th century. The "gripping beast" motif, first seen in Scandinavian art that predates the Viking age, is fully developed in this style. The claws of each beast in the design grip the bodies of adjacent beasts. The decorative carvings from the Oseberg ship burial in Norway exemplify the Oseberg style. Brooches in the Oseberg style have been found in Iceland, such as the two examples found at Skógar in west Iceland.⁶⁴

Borre: This style was used from the last quarter of the 9th century to the mid-point of the 10th. It features mask-like animal heads, pretzel-shaped bodies, and gripping paws. The style is exemplified by the bronze harness mounts found in Borre, Norway.⁶⁵ Examples of the Borre style have been found in Iceland, such as the brooch found at Vað in east Iceland.⁶⁶

Jelling: This style first appeared at the beginning of the 10th century and



This spear, found at the farm Kotmúli in south Iceland, is magnificently decorated with inlays of copper, silver, and niello. It exemplifies the kind of elaborate decorative art applied to many everyday objects in the Viking age (illustration courtesy Michèle Hayeur-Smith, Fornleifastofnun Íslands).

continued through the third quarter of the 10th century. Animal shapes are “S” shaped and are intertwined to form an open interlace pattern with diagonal

symmetry. The exemplar is a silver cup found at Jelling in Denmark, ornamented with animal designs.⁶⁷ A sword chape found in Hafurbjarnarstaðir in west Iceland is of the Jelling style.⁶⁸

Mammen: This style flourished in the last half of the 10th century. Seminaturlistic lion and bird motifs were used, along with the familiar Norse serpent. Characteristically, one or two large motifs fill a panel, with asymmetric scrolls and ornamental lines. The spectacularly decorated silver-inlaid axe-head found in Mammen, Denmark, exemplifies the style.⁶⁹ A carved bone fragment from Ljótstaðir in north Iceland is one of the few examples of the Mammen style found in Iceland.⁷⁰

Ringerike: This style dates from the first half of the 11th century. Lion-like beasts continue to be used, but with tightly clustered tendrils forming their manes and tails. Plant motifs are also used with foliate patterns. The style doesn't take its name from any important find; nothing of the Ringerike style was found at Ringerike, Norway. A good example of the style is the weathervane found in Heggen, Norway.⁷¹ This style came into use at about the same time Christianity was adopted throughout the Viking lands, so it appears in many early church finds. In Iceland, the style is represented by carvings on wooden wall panels found in



Six successive styles of Viking decorative art are recognized. A sample of each style is shown in chronological order, starting at the top and moving clockwise. The *Oseberg* style is represented by a detail from a wood carving on the Oseberg ship. A detail of a brooch found in Vað in east Iceland shows the *Borre* style (illustration courtesy Michèle Hayeur-Smith, Fornleifastofnun Íslands). The *Jelling* style is illustrated by a sword chape found at Hafurbjarnarstaðir in west Iceland (illustration courtesy Michèle Hayeur-Smith, Fornleifastofnun Íslands). The axe found at Mammen exemplifies the *Mammen* style. The *Ringerike* style is represented by carved wooden door panels from Flatatunga in north Iceland. The brooch found at Tröllskógar in south Iceland is one of the finest examples of the *Urnes* style (illustration courtesy Michèle Hayeur-Smith, Fornleifastofnun Íslands).

Flatatunga in north Iceland.⁷² The panels probably were used in the first cathedral at Hólar and represent some of the earliest church decorations from any of the Nordic lands.⁷³

Urnes: This style was used from the middle of the 11th century well into the 12th century. Extremely stylized animals are used, with long, sinuous bodies and with heads and feet reduced to mere elongated terminals. Figure-eight and multi-loop compositions are employed. The style takes its name from the wood carvings at the Urnes stave church in Norway. One of the finest examples of the style is a silver brooch found in south Iceland at Tröllaskógar.⁷⁴

The Urnes style is the last style of Norse art. In the 12th century, uniquely Nordic styles fell out of fashion as styles of continental European art became fashionable throughout the Viking lands.

It has been pointed out that Norse poetry and literature share some of the same complexities as Norse art. In art, exceedingly complicated forms are used all over a figure to create a single unified image. Similarly in literature, multiple plot lines are developed and abandoned, only to be taken up again in order to create a single, unified dramatic narrative.

It's been suggested that this similarity between poetry and visual arts derives from the same underlying sensibility in Viking culture: some innate appreciation and enjoyment of these ornate, baroque forms.

Music and Dance

At a very deep level, music and dance are a significant part of the human experience. Humans have created and enjoyed music in many cultures and many time periods. Yet, if the Vikings created music or dance, they have kept it a secret. There is little evidence in either the literary records or the archaeological records of music or dance in the Viking culture.

The lack of evidence is a surprise, since other contemporary people with whom the Vikings had contact, such as the Celtic people, and the Anglo-Saxons, had music as a part of their culture. One can find the remains of the instruments themselves, descriptions of instruments, stories about instruments, and pictures of instruments in the records of these other cultures.

Did the Icelanders, or any of the Viking people for that matter, perform and enjoy music? If they did, where are the remains of their instruments in the archaeological records? Where are the descriptions of song and music and performance in the sagas? The sources are, for the most part, mysteriously silent.

Most of the references to music in the sagas tend to refer to music in other cultures which were touched by Norse people. Many of the references are late, after the Viking age. Very few of the references involve Icelanders.

One might expect that at least a few Viking-era musical instruments would survive. On one hand, the organic materials from which instruments were

made are unlikely to remain intact after centuries of burial. On the other hand, unusual conditions have permitted a large number of other organic artifacts to have survived. Regardless, few musical instruments or parts of instruments have been found from the Viking age in Viking lands.

The most convincing musical instrument find is the 10th century bone flute, found at Birka, Sweden.⁷⁵ It remains playable today. Other notable artifacts include a portion of a 10th century set of wooden pan pipes found at York, England,⁷⁶ and the 9th century amber bridge from an unknown six-stringed instrument found in a burial at Broa, Sweden.⁷⁷

This is in stark contrast to the countless other bone and wood and amber artifacts, such as combs and ice skates and gamepieces and jewelry. The scarcity in the archaeological record suggests that musical instruments simply were not very common in Viking lands.

The literary record is even more confusing. From the stories, we learn that men of accomplishment prided themselves on their musical abilities. For example, Earl Rögnvaldr Kali Kolsson claimed in one of his verses to have mastered music and verse,⁷⁸ while King Haraldr harðráði claimed to have mastered harp-playing and poetry.⁷⁹

Musical instruments are rarely mentioned in the stories, although harps appear in several of the eddic poems. A harp is mentioned in *Völuspá*, played by a ogress's herdsman.⁸⁰ One of the most familiar examples of harp-playing is the legendary story of Gunnarr in the snake pit, described in both *Atlakviða*⁸¹ and *Atlamál*.⁸² In order to dispose of Gunnarr, Atli had him thrown into a pit filled with venomous snakes. To calm the snakes, Gunnarr played his harp, but to no avail. In *Atlamál*, it is said that Gunnarr played the harp with his toes, presumably because his hands were bound. The episode is illustrated in a wood carving from the portal of the stave church at Hylestad, Norway, carved around the year 1200.⁸³

Music and musical instruments appear only rarely in the *Sagas of Icelanders*, and most typically when Icelanders are abroad. *Víglundar saga* says that in Norway, Earl Eiríkr led King Harald hárfagri and his men into the hall accompanied by all kinds of music and singing and stringed instruments.⁸⁴ The earl gave the king a harp with alternating silver and gold strings.⁸⁵ In *Jökuls þáttur Búasonar*, Jökull Búason was entertained with songs and bassoon music while visiting King Soldan in the land of the Saracens.⁸⁶

A rare example of music being played in Iceland in the sagas appears in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. Helga Bárðardóttir lay in bed all night and played the harp because she wasn't inclined to sleep.⁸⁷

Singing songs (*söngur*) is just as rare in the sagas as the playing of musical instruments. Weapons sing, such as Skarpheðinn Njálsson's axe,⁸⁸ and Gunnarr Hámundarson's halberd.⁸⁹ Christian masses are sung.⁹⁰ Caves sing when they echo back the words spoken inside them.⁹¹ But rarely do people sing.

Instead, people chant (*kveða*). They chant verses of poetry. They chant

magical rites.⁹² They chant to amuse themselves. While imprisoned in Byzantium, Þorsteinn Ásmundarson chanted to keep his spirits high. His fine voice attracted the attention of Spes, who arranged his release.⁹³

Is chanting the Vikings equivalent of singing? From the examples in the stories, it would seem likely.

After the conversion to Christianity near the end of the Viking era, music would more certainly have been a part of daily life. Music in the church in Norse lands would have been the same as anywhere else in Europe at the time: psalms and hymns were sung as part of daily worship.

Dance is not mentioned at all in the *Sagas of Icelanders*. Dance (*danz*) appears in the later contemporary sagas and bishops' sagas written in the 13th and 14th century about contemporary events that took place well after the saga age. Dances were accompanied by songs meant to mock or humiliate, although love songs also accompanied dance.⁹⁴ In *Íslendinga saga*, it is said that the people of Breiðabólstaðir made several dances about Loftr and many other sorts of mockeries.⁹⁵

One expects that if singing and music were an important part of daily life in the saga era, more evidence of it would have survived, both in the literature and in the archaeological records. The lack of evidence proves little. The best we can say is that we simply do not know whether music was performed or not. We do not know the nature of the performances nor the nature of the instruments on which it was performed.

Games and Sports

The Viking people delighted in games, sports, and competitions. Stories in the sagas suggest that people were highly competitive, constantly looking for ways to judge who was stronger or faster or more accomplished. Eysteinn and Sigurðr Magnússon, brothers and joint kings of Norway, were drinking with their men one night. The ale was not good, and the conversation was quiet. King Eysteinn said that it was customary, when men drank together, that they choose someone to compare themselves to. King Eysteinn chose King Sigurðr.⁹⁶

Sigurðr claimed he was a better wrestler. Eysteinn countered he was more agile. Sigurðr said he was better at swimming, but Eysteinn said he was better at ice skating, adding that his brother was no better at it than a cow.⁹⁷

Both indoor board games and outdoor sporting competitions appear to have been regular leisure time activities in Iceland, based on both saga literature and archaeological evidence. The literary sources tell us that games were played regularly, but nothing about the playing fields, the equipment, or the rules.

In the same way that a modern author has no need to outline the rules to a reader when describing a character playing an informal game of football with

friends, the saga authors had no need to describe the details of the saga-age games. In both cases, the intended audience was so familiar with the game that no reminder was needed. As a result, the stories talk about the games being played and the fights that broke out during the games, but nothing about the games themselves.

The best archaeological sources are for board games. Game boards and playing pieces are common finds in grave goods. The game boards that have been found have playing surfaces marked off in squares ranging from 7×7 square up to 15×15 square in the case of the board found in the Gokstad ship burial.⁹⁸ Playing pieces have been found made from a wide variety of material: glass, bone, antler, amber, bronze, and wood.⁹⁹ It's unclear whether dice, which are sometimes found with the playing pieces, are a part of this board game, or, perhaps, a different game.

One board game was called *hnefatafl* or *tafl*. Carvings on memorial stones, such as the Ockelbo stone from Sweden,¹⁰⁰ show people playing board games.¹⁰¹ The object of the game is unknown, but it appears to have been a strategy game in which a king and his retainers controlled by one player are opposed by an army controlled by the other player.

The *hnefatafl* set found in a grave at Baldursheimr in north Iceland contained twenty-four pawns, one king, and one die. The pawns, made from the teeth of marine mammals, were once colored, twelve of them red, the other twelve white.¹⁰² The king is made from whalebone and shows a seated human figure, gripping his beard in both hands.¹⁰³ The die is not a cube, like a modern die, but rather a rectangular prism with four long sides and two short ones. The Baldursheimr die is marked with pips from three through six on the four long faces, and has no markings on the short faces.¹⁰⁴ Because of the geometry of the die, it seems unlikely that the short faces would come up when thrown. The Icelandic law prohibited gambling on dice games or playing board games with money at stake.¹⁰⁵

Skill at playing board games apparently was held in some esteem. The story of King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr comparing their accomplishments summarized earlier in this chapter also appears in a slightly different form in *Morkinskinna*. In that text, Sigurðr claimed he was stronger and a better swimmer, but Eysteinn countered, "That is true, but I am more skilled and better at board games, and that is worth as much as your strength."¹⁰⁶

The mythological poem *Völuspá* says that the gods, too, once played board games in a meadow, during the golden age of the gods.¹⁰⁷ The poem predicts that after Ragnarök, the dissolution and rebirth of the world, good fortune will once again return, beginning with the finding of the golden playing pieces in the meadow.¹⁰⁸

Children also played board games, with results not very different from children of today. King Haraldr came upon three boys playing a board game outdoors, under some trees. Two were playing against one, and the two were

losing. They upset the board, which annoyed the third, and all three came to blows.¹⁰⁹

The saga literature is filled of references to sporting games (*leikar*). Some of the games mentioned include ball games, skin-throwing games, scraper games, wrestling, swimming, and horse fights. The games were important social events for the community and could last for days. Games took place whenever people came together for feasts, assemblies, or religious festivals. Sometimes, prominent men called people together for a *leikmót* (games meeting) specifically to take part in games.

The competition was a bit more rugged than might be acceptable today, which only underscores the competitive nature of the Viking people. The stories suggest that serious injury or death was not uncommon. The law states that a man may leave a game at any time he pleases, thus he himself is responsible for any unintentional injuries he may suffer, if they do not result in permanent injury or death.¹¹⁰

Knattleikr (ball game) was played with a hard ball and a bat. The nature of the rules, the object of the game, and the layout of the playing field are all unknown. However, the stories provide a few clues.

Gísla saga has a brief description of the game played at the pond Seftjörn in Haukadálr. It appears to have been a full contact sport, in which people were physically held back and tackled while the ball was in play. The saga says the ball could go out of play at times, but that didn't seem to stop the players from struggling against each other to recover the ball.¹¹¹

Grettis saga says that ball games were played every autumn at Miðfjarðarvatn lake in north Iceland. The saga describes opposing players lined up facing one another.¹¹² Individual players on opposing sides were matched based on strength.¹¹³

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, exceptionally strong players played only against one another.¹¹⁴ *Egils saga* says that players were divided into teams,¹¹⁵ and that opposing players were paired up.¹¹⁶ At one point, a player caught the ball and ran with it while opposing players chased him.¹¹⁷

The sagas say little about the equipment used in the game. The ball (*knöttr*) was hard enough that, when thrown in anger, it could cause an injury and draw blood,¹¹⁸ or knock over a man.¹¹⁹ Loose balls could travel a long distance.¹²⁰

The bat (*knatttré*) was almost certainly made of wood. Whatever its construction, it could be mended on the spot, while the game progressed.¹²¹ The bat is occasionally called a *knattgildra* in the stories, which has the sense of a trap for a ball. Did the bat have a crook or a net which was used to catch and hold the ball? The texts are silent on the details.

Many modern students of the sagas interpret the texts to mean that the game was played on ice, but in only one saga does the saga text specifically say the game was played on ice.¹²²

Additionally, the author can attest that an icy surface does not make for a



Gísla saga says that the people of Dýrafjörðr played *knattleikr*, the Viking ball game, near the pond Seftjörn, immediately adjacent to the fjord. Today, the pond is overgrown with vegetation, but in the saga-age, that vegetation would have been regularly harvested. Little is known about the game, but it clearly was an enjoyable, violent, and often deadly pastime for saga-age Icelanders (author photograph).

very good playing surface for a game that requires running and chasing a ball, either while wearing medieval turnshoes, or, as some have suggested, while wearing medieval bone ice skates. Neither form of footwear provide the player with any significant control over speed or direction while on ice, turning the game into a farce.

The game was most often played near bodies of water, and it is sometimes described as being played in winter with snow on the ground.¹²³ Yet, there are examples where the game was played in places with no water, or at times of the year, such as Winter Nights, when an iced-over pond would seem to have been unlikely in saga-age Iceland.¹²⁴

The games were regional, so it seems probable that players from several dozen or even many dozens of farms participated.¹²⁵ That implies dozens of players might be on the field simultaneously, rather than hundreds, or a small handful. In describing a long fight, *Íslendinga saga* says that men rested during the fight as if in a ball game, suggesting that players dropped out to rest at times while they played the game.¹²⁶ Games could last for days or even weeks, and they were viewed by many spectators.¹²⁷ Large crowds gathered to watch the games at Seftjörn in west Iceland, because they wanted to see who was the strongest and best player.¹²⁸ Women watched the game while sitting on the slope adjacent to the pond.¹²⁹

In knattleikr, as in all the games, disputes between players could turn bloody. As the game progressed in *Grettis saga*, Auðunn Ásgeirsson hit the ball over Grettir Ásmundarson's head so that he couldn't catch it. Grettir lost his temper, thinking that Auðunn had done this to make fun of him. Grettir fetched the ball over the ice, and when he returned, he hurled the ball at Auðunn's forehead, making him bleed. Auðunn struck at Grettir with his bat, but Grettir dodged the blow. They grappled and started wrestling. Grettir lost his balance and went down, and Auðunn kned him in the groin. At this point, many stepped forward to stop the fight. The incident was not permitted to develop into a quarrel, but nonetheless, a bloody feud ultimately developed.¹³⁰

Little is known about scraper games (*sköfuleikr*). It appears to have involved the use of pot scrapers made of horn. Even less is known about turf games (*torfleikr*). The game was played at the regional assembly at Þórsnessþing in west Iceland. A sandy piece of turf flew up during the game and hit Þórðr blíg so hard that it knocked him off his feet, which started a fight.¹³¹

Hornaskinnleikr or *skinnleikr* (skin game) was played indoors, in the hall, using a rolled up bearskin. Four players threw the bearskin back and forth among themselves while a fifth player tried to get the skin. People stood on the benches while the game was played, and it appeared to involve shoving, tripping, and no small amount of commotion. The saga author says it was not a good idea to get in the way of the shoving.¹³²

Young boys had their own games, called *sveinaleikr*, which appeared to be no less rough and tumble than the adult games. As a young boy, Egill Skalla-Grímsson was a skilled wrestler and quick-tempered at games. Men around the district knew they had to teach their sons to give in to him.¹³³

Þorgils Þórðarson was five years old when he wanted to join in a *sveinaleikr* game. The other boys said he could not be in the game unless he had killed some living thing. Þorgils left the field, displeased with the situation.¹³⁴

While Egill was playing in a *sveinaleikr* game, one of his young opponents treated him roughly. Later in the game, Egill ran up to the boy on the field and drove an axe into his head, killing him, to repay him for his rough treatment earlier in the game. Egill was six years old at the time.¹³⁵

While there is little evidence, it's believed that the *sveinaleikr* game shared many elements with knattleikr.

Wrestling (*glíma*) was a contest of strength. A win was recorded if the opponent was thrown off his feet, or lifted clear and then dropped onto any body part except the feet. Grettir wrestled with Þórðr at Hegrannessþing. Þórðr ran at Grettir, but Grettir did not budge. Grettir reached over the back of Þórðr, grabbed his breeches, and threw him backwards over his head, such that Þórðr landed on his shoulders.¹³⁶

Kjalnesinga saga tells of a wrestling match arranged by King Haraldr hárfagri (fine-hair) in Norway. Búi Andriðsson fought with an unnamed black man

(*blámaðr*). The match was both for sport, but it also had a judicial element as well, since Haraldr and some of his followers had a score to settle with Búi.

Everyone expected the black man would kill Búi. The match was held on a level field surrounded by raised ground from where a great crowd watched the fight. Set in the center of the field was a stone which rose to a narrow top, known as a wrestling stone (*fanghella*). Búi wore a wrestling jacket (*fangastakkr*) which protected him from the grip of his opponent.

Búi managed to remain on his feet, and his clothes protected him from broken bones. Búi saw that the black man was trying to get him to the stone where his back could be broken. Búi allowed himself to be maneuvered into position, and when his opponent pushed him on to the stone, Búi jumped backward over it, and forced the man onto the stone. Búi jumped on the back of his opponent, driving him on to the sharp stone and breaking open his ribs. The man was dead.¹³⁷

Weight lifting competitions used stones. The man who could lift the heaviest boulder was the winner.

The swimming competitions might be more accurately called drowning competitions; the goal was to see who could hold his opponent underwater the longest. *Laxdæla saga* tells of a match between Kjartan Ólafsson and an anonymous swimmer who turned out to be King Óláfr Tryggvason. The king praised Kjartan's swimming abilities.¹³⁸

When King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr compared their accomplishments, they mentioned other forms of water sports. Sigurðr said he was better at swimming (*sund*) than Eysteinn and claimed he could put Eysteinn underwater any time he wanted. Eysteinn claimed he could swim (*svimma*) as far as Sigurðr and could dive better (*kafsyndr*), too.¹³⁹

In horse fights, two stallions were goaded to fight against each other until one of them was killed or ran away.¹⁴⁰ To further incite the stallions, mares were tethered at the edge of the grounds, within sight and smell of the stallions. Grettir Ásmundarson held his stallion back by the tail during a fight while goading him with a stick. His opponent, Oddr ómagaskáld (pauper-poet), jabbed at Grettir with his stick during the horse fight. Grettir returned the jab to Oddr so forcefully that Oddr and his horse fell into the river below.¹⁴¹

In another horse fight, Gunnarr Hámundarson matched his stallion against one brought to the fight by Þorgeirr Starkaðarson and Kolr Egilsson. Gunnarr made ready for the fight, holding a stick in his hand to goad his horse.¹⁴²

The horses went at it and bit each other for a long time, so there was no need to goad them. Þorgeirr and Kolr decided to give their horse a push in the hopes that it would cause Gunnarr to fall down, but Gunnarr pushed back, and the horse fell on top of Þorgeirr and Kolr. They rushed at him. Gunnarr threw Kolr down, while Þorgeirr struck out at Gunnarr's horse with his goad, knocking out the horse's eye. Gunnarr knocked down Þorgeirr with his stick and then asked his brother to kill the horse rather than let it live maimed.¹⁴³

Vikings were familiar with the concept of mock combat, called *skylming*. It's not clear whether this fencing was for sport, for practice, or perhaps for both. While in Norway, Gunnlaugr ormstunga came upon two men fencing who were surrounded by many spectators. Gunnlaugr walked away in silence when he realized they mocked him as they fenced.¹⁴⁴

The playing of outdoor games appears to have been limited to men. Women are described as watching knattleikr, but never playing it. In *Hallfreðar saga vandræskálds*, Valgerðr Óttarsdóttir and other women sat on the slopes near the ball field, watching the game. During the game, Ingólfr Þorsteinsson threw the ball, and it flew up towards the women. Valgerðr caught the ball and allowed it to slip under her cloak, saying that whoever threw the ball should come fetch it.¹⁴⁵

It seems highly unlikely that women attended horse fights, where fights between men seemed to be as much a part of the sport as the fights between horses.

Board games, however, were played by both men and women. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* says that Helga Þorsteinsdóttir and Gunnlaugr ormstunga played board games together while Gunnlaugr was staying with her family and studying law with her father.¹⁴⁶

Children had toys of their own with which they played. A variety of carved wooden children's toys from the period have been found, including horses, ships, and other figures. Child-sized wooden weapons have also been found.¹⁴⁷ Other children's toys are mentioned in the sagas. In chapter 12 of *Víga-Glúms saga*, a six year old boy gave his bronze toy horse to a four year old, saying it suited the younger child better.¹⁴⁸

Other forms of entertainment are also mentioned in the sagas and eddic poetry, but with few details: performance of poetry, telling of stories, exchanging news and gossip, drinking games, and *flyting* (exchange of insults).

Fljótsdæla saga says that the farmer Hreiðar sat reading a story until late in the evening, but it seems highly unlikely that books and evening reading were a part of life in saga-age Iceland. The description must surely be an anachronism, an event more likely to have taken place in the era when the sagas were being written.¹⁴⁹

Religion, Myth, and Cult

While much of the Norse mythology was preserved in Icelandic writings, very little of the cult and religious practices of saga-age Icelanders was recorded.

Mythology

That the myths were preserved at all is a surprise. The Icelanders who committed these myths to vellum were, without exception, Christians. Why would Christians preserve stories about heathen gods, who were thought to be the personification of Satan?

At least a part of the answer is that without knowledge of the myths, it would not have been possible to understand skaldic poetry, considered by the Norse people to be an art of the highest form. Without an intimate familiarity with the old myths, it would not be possible to compose new poetry or to understand existing poetry, due to the complicated diction of the poetry, which contained many allusions to the myths.

In the early part of the 13th century, the Icelandic poet and chieftain Snorri Sturluson wrote a book, commonly referred to as the *Snorra Edda*, to teach young poets the art of skaldic poetry. Part of that teaching included the mythological stories on which the poetry depend.

Snorri encouraged the young poets for whom he wrote the book to learn the ancient terms in order to understand the metaphorical verse, but also warned that Christian men should not believe in heathen gods.¹

Other surviving sources of mythology include the eddic poetry preserved in the *Codex Regius* (GkS 2365 4to), often referred to as the *Poetic Edda*, and in other Icelandic manuscripts, as well as on Viking era picture stones that illustrate the myths. Such stones are found in other Viking lands, but not in Iceland.

Taken together, the sources tell stories of gods and goddesses who were far from being perfect or immortal. They exhibit flaws and shortcomings that would be familiar and recognizable in the world of men. They argued and fought over matters ranging from petty to monumental. They battled super-

natural creatures such as giants, and they wooed and wedded them, as well. They cuckolded each other. They occasionally killed each other.

The stories tell of two families of gods, the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*. The *Æsir* are the gods of battle and victory, led by Óðinn and his strong, but not very bright son, Þórr. The *Vanir* are the gods of fertility, led by Freyr and Freyja, brother and sister.

The stories tell of the creation of the world, and of the death of all but one pair of giants (*jötnar*), the personification of chaos that threatens to disrupt order. The stories tell of a golden age, free of strife, which came to a close with the war between the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*, the first war in the world. From that time, the world of the gods has been a downward spiral, with bickering and feuding and occasional killing, and a relentless battle between the gods and their foes who would destabilize the world of the gods and the world of men. This is this world in which saga-age heathens lived in Iceland: a world threatened by monsters barely held in check by the gods.

The less than lofty behaviors of the gods and goddesses are related in the poem *Lokasenna* in which Loki, a trickster god, taunts and insults the assembled gods and goddesses at a feast.² He accuses Bragi of being a coward; Freyja of being a whore; Óðinn of being womanly; Frigg and Sif of being adulteresses; Þórr of being a coward; and Njörðr of permitting his mouth to be used as a chamberpot by the giants. The gibes are cruel, but on the mark. The very worst behaviors of the gods and goddesses are highlighted and ridiculed. Some of the incidents to which Loki refers don't survive in any of the poems or stories, suggesting that some of the mythology has been lost.

Völuspá tells of what is yet to come. In this hauntingly powerful poem, a *völva* (prophetess) tells Óðinn about future events: Ragnarök, the doom of the gods, followed by the dissolution of the world, and later, its rebirth.

The surviving stories about the gods are lively and entertaining, and in some cases, comedic and irreverent, causing some modern scholars to wonder if they weren't written by Christians during the Viking era to mock belief in the old heathen gods.

Þrymskviða tells the story of how Þórr's hammer was stolen by the giant Þrymr.³ For the return of the hammer, Þrymr wanted the hand of Freyja in marriage. Freyja would have none of that, and ultimately, Heimdallr came up with a plan. The gods decided to disguise Þórr in bridal clothes and send him in Freyja's place to the wedding. At the wedding feast, Þrymr was disconcerted by "Freyja's" enormous appetite and capacity for drink, and by her frightening visage under the veil, but the ceremony continued. When the hammer was brought out to sanctify the marriage, Þórr snatched it up and used it to kill all of the giants at the feast.

The date of *Þrymskviða* is controversial, with good arguments for both an early and a late date. Certain aspects of the poetic form suggest a late date, while aspects of the language suggest an early date.⁴ Regardless, many of these myths

are believed to have deep roots, predating the arrival of Christianity in Scandinavia by centuries.⁵ Picture stones illustrating the myths survive from well before the Viking age.

One of the myths tells of the mead of poetry, the inspirational drink given by Óðinn to poets. The story is illustrated on a picture stone in Gotland that dates from around the year 700⁶ and is told in written form both in *Skáldskaparmál* in the *Snorra Edda*,⁷ and in *Hávamál* in the *Poetic Edda*.⁸ From the creation of the picture stone to Snorri's writings is a span of five centuries, which attests to the longevity and the popularity of the story among the northern people.

The mead was created from honey and blood by two dwarves. Suttungr, a giant, coerced the mead from the dwarves, and he set the mead inside the mountain Hnitbjörg, with his daughter Gunnlöð guarding it. Óðinn, in the form of a snake, made his way into the mountain to Gunnlöð and the mead. In the shape of a man, Óðinn beguiled her. They slept together for three nights, and then, unable to deny him anything, Gunnlöð agreed to let Óðinn have three sips of mead.

In three great draughts, he consumed all the mead, then flew off in the form of an eagle, with Suttungr, also in the form of an eagle, hard on his tail. As Óðinn flew over the walls of Ásgarðr, the home of the gods, he spat the mead into enormous caldrons that had been prepared for him. In his excitement, some of the mead came out backwards and fell outside the walls.

Óðinn gives the mead, the gift of poetry, to the gods and to the occasional man who is skilled at poetry. The portion that came out backwards is the rhymester's share, for any inferior, would-be poet.

The story highlights many of Óðinn's less attractive attributes: his cunning, his deceit, and his treachery. *Hávamál* suggests that in seducing Gunnlöð, Óðinn broke a ring-oath, the most sacred oath among the northern people and generally considered inviolable.

Practices and Cult

Although we have some knowledge about the myths that formed the basis of the Norse religious beliefs, we know almost nothing about the practices that formed the basis of the Norse pagan religion.

The Christian church saw the heathen rites as devilry, and medieval authors took little interest in them, as compared to the myths. The Icelandic literature contains a few descriptions of heathen temples and rituals, written by Christian Icelandic authors centuries after the saga age. There are some accounts of the heathen rituals by contemporary foreign authors in the medieval literature, both by Christians, and by Muslims.

All of these sources pose many problems with interpretation. Christian

authors often framed the description of the heathen practices in terms of more familiar Christian practices, while simultaneously highlighting the differences between the profane heathen practices and the sacred Christian practices. In the process, they may have significantly distorted the description. In some cases, the authors were foreigners who did not have understood what they saw, or the language that was being spoken. In some cases, the authors wrote about things they did not witness, using second or third hand accounts. Any information about the Norse religious practices has to be considered highly speculative.

The Norse heathen religion in saga-age Iceland did not have the regular organization that was so important to the Christian church of the time. Religion was not a separate institution; it was a part of ordinary life. Rather than special temples and priests, it was maintained by ordinary people in or near their homes. The *goðar* (chieftains) who led the secular activities also led the religious celebrations. Many people probably worshiped outdoors. For example, Swedish traders made sacrifices under a huge oak tree on an island in the Black Sea to give thanks for a successful voyage down the river Dnieper on their trading voyages.⁹

In Iceland, *Landnámabók* says that Þorsteinn rauðnefr (red nose) worshipped a waterfall,¹⁰ that Þórir snepill (flap) worshipped a tree grove,¹¹ and that Eyvindr Loðinsson worshipped the boulders at Gunnsteinar.¹²

The gods and goddesses were visualized in human form. They were more powerful and stronger than humans, but recognizably human, with many human weaknesses.

Men sought the protection of these deities, through sacrifice and feasting. The rites which supported the gods helped to maintain the established order and to keep out the chaos which, according to the mythology, continually threatened the world of men.

To the Icelanders, the gods were friends, or even distant family members, to whom one turned both in good times and bad. To foster the two-way trust that was needed for such a relationship, Icelanders frequented sacred places, ate and drank in the gods' honor, and offered gifts and sacrifices in return for luck and protection. They made sacrifices to the Æsir for victory, and to the Vanir for good harvests and fertility.

There was no obligation to accept a particular god. If one's luck failed, one could desert one god in favor of another. No doubt that some Norse heathens turned to Christ because He gave hope for better luck than the heathen god they previously worshipped.

Place names and personal names suggest that Þórr was especially beloved in saga-age Iceland. Many personal names are compounds with Þórr, far more than any of the other gods: Þorbjörn, Þórdís, Þorfinnr, Þórey, Þorgeirr, Þorgerðr, Þorgrímr, and Þórhallr, as just a few examples. *Eyrbyggja saga* tells us that Þorbrandr Þorfinnsson married Þuríðr Þorfinnsdóttir, and they named their children Þorleifr, Þóroddr, Þorfinnr, Þormóðr, Þorgerðr, and Snorri.¹³

The sagas tell of men who worshipped and sacrificed to individual gods. Hrafnkell Freysgoði is said to have loved no god more than Freyr, and so he dedicated half of his best livestock to the god.¹⁴

Þórólfr Mostrarskegg asked Þórr, whom he considered a friend, for advice — should he stay in Norway or emigrate to Iceland.¹⁵ Þórr advised him to leave, and when Þórólfr arrived in Iceland, he asked Þórr to guide him to a suitable place to settle. Þórólfr threw his high-seat pillars, carved with the image of Þórr, overboard into the water.

Later, Þórólfr found Þórr and the pillars on a headland, which he called *Þórsnes* (Þórr's headland).¹⁶ Þórólfr carried fire to claim his land, as far east as the river he called *Þorsá* (Þórr's river).¹⁷ Late in life, Þórólfr had a son, whom he dedicated to the god Þórr. He named the boy Þorsteinn.¹⁸

Þórólfr had a *hof* (temple) built below *Helgafell* (holy mountain) and dedicated it to Þórr.¹⁹ The description is one of the most complete descriptions of a heathen temple extant in the literature. It is also highly improbable.

In the saga, the temple is described as a large house (*mikit hús*).²⁰ In the middle of the floor was a pedestal on which stood an armring for the swearing of oaths, a bowl for sacrificial blood, and idols. All farmers had to pay a tax to the temple, and they were obliged to support the goði, who maintained the temple and held the sacrificial feasts.²¹

To date, no archaeological evidence of such elaborate structures has been found. Large longhouses have been excavated in Iceland, such as at Hólmr near Höfn, at Hofteigr on Jökulsá á Brú, and notably at Hofstaðir near Mývatn, where the longhouse was more than 125 feet (38 meters) long. The evidence that these structures were heathen temples has not generally been compelling.

In the first part of the 20th century, ruins were examined on the site of Sæból in Haukadalr at Dýrafjörðr, in west Iceland. In *Gísla saga*, it says that Þorgrímr made sacrifices to Freyr there. After his death, snow never settled on Þorgrímr's grave mound, because Freyr found Þorgrímr's sacrifices so endearing that he didn't want the ground between the two of them to freeze.²²

The Danish archaeologist Aage Roussel reported finding the remains of a building 21 feet (6.5 meters) square.²³ He was convinced he had found temple remains, although few would be so convinced today.

It's not clear what we should expect to see if we were to find the remains of a temple. How would a temple be distinguished from any other Viking-age structure? There are probably few differences in construction or architectural details that would distinguish a religious building from a normal dwelling.²⁴

Recent archaeological work has suggested one possible answer. Excavations at the Viking-age farm of Borg in Östergötland in Sweden have uncovered some unusual artifacts that suggest cultic activities took place on the site. In particular, the animal bones uncovered show an atypical preponderance of skull and jaw bones. The bones show evidence of violent blows that are not consistent with ordinary slaughter.²⁵

Recent work at Hofstaðir in north Iceland has also found curious evidence of atypical slaughtering of cattle, suggesting a recurring ritual activity on the farm. Evidence suggests that cattle in their prime were slaughtered by striking the animal between the eyes, crushing the skull, while beheading it with a simultaneous blow using a two handed axe, producing a fountain of blood in a dramatic display of weapon-handling prowess. The skulls were then displayed outdoors, for months or perhaps years.²⁶

The forensic evidence from the cattle bones, combined with other curious features found at the farm site, strongly suggest that Hofstaðir was the site of cult activities during the saga age.

Several episodes in the sagas suggest that however they were constructed and whatever activities may have taken place within, temples were considered sacred, where violence towards men was forbidden.

A passage in *Egils saga* describes some activities in the main temple at Gaular in Norway. After a sacrifice and feast, men were drinking at night in the temple. Eyvindr skreyja (braggart) and Þorvaldr ofsi (overbearing) were paired in a drinking game. Under orders from Queen Gunnhildr, Eyvindr killed Þorvaldr with a *sax* (short sword). No one else was armed in such a sacred spot; it was unthinkable. Eyvindr had committed murder, so he was declared an outlaw on the spot for defiling the temple.²⁷

Vatnsdæla saga tells of Ingimundr Þorsteinsson, who gave accommodations over the winter to a Norwegian ship captain named Hrafn. Ingimundr wanted Hrafn's sword, but Hrafn wouldn't willingly give it up. So Ingimundr devised a plan to trick Hrafn out of the sword.

Ingimundr drew Hrafn into a discussion and casually walked into the temple. Without thinking, Hrafn followed, deep in conversation. Once inside the temple, Ingimundr turned to Hrafn and told him he had exposed himself to the wrath of the gods by carrying his sword into the temple.²⁸ The best way to reduce the risk of vengeance from the gods, explained Ingimundr, would be for Hrafn to hand over his sword to Ingimundr.²⁹

Saga-age Icelanders, if they set up any structure at all for worship, probably set up small shrines for their own personal use. Here might be kept a bowl for sacrifices, and possibly an armring for oaths. It seems more likely that worship took place out of doors, beside a mound, a great stone, a waterfall, or a sacred tree.³⁰ One of the few surviving fragments of heathen law-code required that every public temple keep a silver armring, weighing no less than two ounces. The *goði* was to wear the ring at all assemblies and to redden the ring in the blood of a sacrificial animal.³¹

At the annual Alþing, a bull was sacrificed, and the sacred ring on which oaths were sworn was washed in the blood of the animal.

In several sections of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, King Óláfr is described demolishing heathen temples in Norway at the end of the 10th century. The idols were destroyed, the ring taken, and the temple burned down.³²

Few artifacts that can be identified as idols have survived. A bronze figure interpreted as a seated Þórr holding his hammer was found in Eyjarland in northern Iceland, although it may well be merely a gaming piece.³³

Feasts and sacrifices were an important part of Norse religious rites. While these rites were conducted on special occasions, there were also regularly occurring feasts in which the entire community took part. One occurred at the beginning of winter, when sacrifices were made for plenty during the approaching winter season. Another occurred at mid-winter for the fertility of crops and livestock in the spring. A third took place in the spring, for victory and success on raids and other expeditions to come in the summer.³⁴

These festivals were a time for extended feasting by the entire community. Sacrificial animals were killed and eaten, and ale was drunk in honor of the gods and in honor of departed kinsmen and ancestors. An essential element was that the entire community eat and drink together, although other community activities, such as games and sporting events, were likely to have been a part of the festivities.

Óláfs saga helga briefly describes the feasting ritual in Norway at the beginning of the 11th century. Toasts were made to the gods. Cattle and horses were slaughtered, and their blood used to redden the idols. These sacrifices were performed to improve the harvests.³⁵

This sort of sacrifice was called a *blót*. The offering was meant to strengthen the gods, who would thus look more favorably on the people making the offering.³⁶ Animals were sacrificed, and as part of the ritual, the participants ate the meat and drank the ale, both of which were blessed by the *goði*. The participants drank to the gods: to the *Æsir* for victory, and to the *Vanir* for fertility and peace. These sacrifices are what separated heathens from Christians.

Gísla saga describes feasts surrounding the Winter Nights sacrifice (*vetrnáttablót*) that took place at the end of summer, around the middle of October. The saga says that after he returned from Denmark on a trading voyage, Gísli Súrsson no longer sacrificed, yet he still held magnificent feasts at his home at Hóll.³⁷

The following year, Winter Nights sacrifices were taking place simultaneously at Gísli's farm, and at the neighboring farm at Sæból, run by Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson, Gísli's brother-in-law. Strained relationships between the various branches of the families made it impossible for them to feast together. Þorgrímr planned to sacrifice to Freyr. Rushes from the nearby pond Seftjörn were strewn on the floor. At Hóll, Gísli expected at least sixty guests, and he and his wife Auðr Vésteinsdóttir prepared to hang the tapestry received as a gift from her brother. Drinking was planned at both feasts.³⁸

Adam of Bremen wrote about heathen sacrifices that took place in Sweden. He was an 11th century cleric and was the Archbishop of Bremen's expert in missionary affairs. Adam wrote about affairs in Scandinavia during this time. His book, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, is a valuable, although

flawed, resource. It represents some of the earliest written literature about Scandinavia, but most of it is based on second-hand and third-hand information.

Especially valuable is his description of the heathen practices which still took place at that time in Sweden. Adam wrote that every nine years, sacrifices of animals and men were made at the temple at Uppsala. Afterwards, the bodies of the victims were hung on trees by the temple. The festival lasted for nine days, with one human victim offered daily, along with each species of animal or bird.

The sacrifice is performed thus: nine head of every living male creature are offered, and it is the custom to placate the gods with the blood of these. The bodies are hung in a grove which stands beside the temple. This grove is so holy for the heathens that each of the separate trees is believed to be divine because of the death and gore of the objects sacrificed; there dogs and horses hang together with men. One of the Christians told me that he had seen seventy-two bodies hanging together. For the rest, the incantations which they are accustomed to sing at this kind of sacrificial rite are manifold and disgraceful; and therefore it is better to be silent about them.³⁹

The sacrifice was made at the beginning of summer, the traditional time of offerings to Óðinn, in return for victory in the coming season.

In most cases, it appears that the humans chosen for sacrifice were thieves and slaves and criminals. When King Óláfr Tryggvason attempted to force Christianity on Norway at the end of the 10th century, he threatened to introduce new sacrifices if people refused to give up the old religion. The victims would not be slaves or criminals, as was customary. Instead, the king said that those selected will be the most distinguished of men, naming ten prominent men in the group of farmers facing the king.⁴⁰

One of the few references to human sacrifice in Iceland occurs in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Around the beginning of the 10th century, a þing site was defiled when blood was spilled in a skirmish. As a result, the þing site was moved. The author of the saga, writing in the 13th century, described the new site. There was a circle, where people were sentenced to be sacrificed, with *Þórssteinn* (Þórr's stone) inside it, on which the victim's backs were broken. The saga author concludes the description by saying that one can still see the blood on the stone.⁴¹ Even in the 21st century, visitors may believe they see the blood on the stone. The natural coloring of the top surface of *Þórssteinn* is reminiscent of dried blood.

The available evidence concerning the saga-age heathen religion in Iceland is confused. It's an incomplete and distorted picture of a fluid and changing body of religious beliefs and practices. Some men chose not to worship any god at all.⁴² One of these *goðlauss* (godless) men was Hallr *goðlauss*, an early settler in Iceland. Both he and his father refused to hold sacrifices, but instead, believed in their own strength.⁴³

Yet other Icelanders clearly felt a close and personal relationship with the gods. Egill Skalla-Grímsson's poem "Sonatorrek," composed on the death of



The author of *Eyrbyggja saga* says that humans were sacrificed in the saga age as part of Viking heathen cult practices at Þórssteinn (Thor's stone). Writing in the 13th century, the saga author says that you can still see the blood on the stone, and indeed the natural coloring of the top of the stone is very reminiscent of dried blood (author photograph).

two of his sons, illuminates the relation between the heathen Norseman and the gods better than perhaps any other surviving literature.

Böðvarr, who was Egill's youngest and most promising son, drowned when his boat capsized in Borgarfjörðr. Egill was devastated by the loss of his son, barely an adult, especially after the recent loss of another son. Egill locked himself in his bed-closet, planning to stay there until he died. His daughter, Þórgerðr, was called in to help. She tricked him into taking nourishment and then convinced him to compose a memorial poem.

The poem is a torrent of raw emotion. Egill blamed Óðinn for his devastating loss. He had trusted the god, but in taking Böðvarr, Óðinn tore the friendship apart. Egill was no longer eager to sacrifice to the god. Yet, when he added it up, Egill found that Óðinn had given him good things that compensated for the loss. As a poet and a warrior, Egill appreciated Óðinn's gifts of skill in poetry, and of the ability to discern his true enemies.⁴⁴

The Supernatural

Other supernatural creatures inhabited the landscape of saga-age Iceland. The creatures are described in the myths, and the sagas tell how settlers tried

to propitiate these beings, some of whom were believed to hold the power of life and death over the settlers.

Álfar (elves) are close confederates of the gods. In the myth of creation, the elves and the gods are linked, as if the elves were only one step lower than the *Æsir*. The light elves live in a splendid place called *Álfheim*, while the dark elves live underground.

A refrain found in poetic verse is *Hvat er með Ásum? Hvat er með álfum?* (How fare the *Æsir*? How fare the elves?),⁴⁵ a nicely alliterative couplet in Icelandic. Elves were hard to deal with, rewarding generously, but attacking cruelly. While sacrifices to the elves (*álfablót*) are mentioned in the sagas, the elves seem to be less important in saga-age Iceland than they had been earlier in other Viking lands.

Kormáks saga tells of a sacrifice to the elves in Iceland. Kormákr Ögmundarson and Þorvarðr Eysteinsson fought a duel. Þorvarðr was protected by magic, so Kormákr's sword didn't bite him. Eventually, Kormákr was able to break Þorvarðr's ribs with his sword, which ended the duel.

Þorvarðr's injuries healed slowly, so he consulted the woman who had provided the original magic spells. She told him to buy the bull that Kormákr had sacrificed after winning the duel. He should use the bull's blood to redden a nearby hill where elves were known to live and leave the meat for the elves to feast upon.⁴⁶ Þorvarðr followed the instructions and recovered speedily.

Dvergar (dwarves) are wise and skilled in crafts. The myths tell how the dwarves made the treasures of the gods, such as Þórr's hammer, Freyr's ship, and Óðinn's golden arm-ring. The dwarves are the repository of secret wisdom. They live among the rocks away from light, because sunlight causes them to turn to stone. There is no evidence that the dwarves were worshipped, but men were wary of them and took care not to offend them.

Jötnar (giants) live in a place called *Jötunheimr*, outside the land of men (*Miðgarðr*) and the land of gods (*Ásgarðr*). The world was created from the body of a giant, and the first Norse gods were mothered by a giant. The gods have seduced and married the daughters of giants, yet giants have never been successful at winning the hands of goddesses. Giants are fearsome and threatening, both to men and to gods. Þórr spends much of his time battling giants.

Grettir Ásmundarson had several encounters with giants in Iceland. In *Bárðardalr*, in the north, Grettir found a giant in a cave under a waterfall and battled the giant for his treasure.⁴⁷

While an outlaw, Grettir lived for a winter with a family of giants in *Þórisdalr*, a remote and desolate valley in the highlands.⁴⁸ Having visited that forlorn spot, I can attest that only a giant or an outlaw would choose to live in such a forbidding place. Yet, the saga author mentions that Grettir had some pleasure with the giant's daughters, suggesting that the place was less forlorn back when giants lived in the valley than today.⁴⁹

Draugar are the ghosts of dead people. Some dead people, not content to

lie in their grave mounds, live on after death. Usually, these are people who committed some evil deed during their life. The ghosts return to harass the living, causing illness, insanity, and death.

Eyrbyggja saga tells of Þórólfr bægifótr (twist-foot), an early settler in the region. When he died, he was buried on a ridge in the mountains above the fjord. However, he did not lie quietly in his grave, and his ghost terrified the local farmers by killing sheep and shepherds. After Arnkell reburied the body, Þórólfr lay quietly as long as Arnkell was alive,⁵⁰ but after his son's death, Þórólfr once again became active.⁵¹

Dísir are female spirits. They function as a personal guardian and a fertility goddess.⁵² The sagas describe sacrifices to the *dísir* (*dísablót*) which occurred at the beginning of winter in Norway, but not, apparently, in Iceland. *Egils saga* tells of a *dísablót* attended by Egill Skalla-Grímsson and King Eiríkr blóðøx (blood-axe) in Atley in Norway.⁵³

While they are normally well disposed towards mankind, the *dísir* can be merciless. *Þiðranda þáttr og Þórhalls* tells how Þiðrandi was attacked and killed by *dísir* at a time when his family was planning to convert to Christianity.⁵⁴ The *þáttr* is clearly a late interpolation, but allusion is made to the incident in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. In the saga, the author lists the sons of Síðu-Hallr and includes "Þiðrandi, whom, it is said, the *dísir* killed."⁵⁵

Landvættir are land spirits on whom the prosperity of the land depends. They live in the land, usually in particularly attractive rocks and boulders. The *landvættir* were treated with respect. The Icelandic settlers believed their new land was inhabited by *landvættir* who were capable of harming the settlers if angered.⁵⁶ The settlers asked the gods to guide them to a place to settle that was agreeable with the *landvættir*. Icelandic law required that approaching ships remove their dragon-head prows so as not to frighten the *landvættir*.⁵⁷

Fylgjur are personal guardian spirits in the shape of an animal, a kind of *doppelgänger*. A *fylgja* follows its human and prevents danger and accidents. By banging on a door or wall, the *fylgja* may notify its human of a friend's arrival, or of an accident about to happen. A fearless man might have a brave animal, such as a bear, as a *fylgja*, while a timid person might have a hare or bird. Seeing one's own *fylgja* is a sign that death is close at hand.

Þórðr Sigtryggsson mentioned to Njáll Þorgeirsson that he saw something strange: a goat covered in blood. Njáll saw nothing. He realized that Þórðr was seeing his *fylgja* and that he was a doomed man.⁵⁸

Magic

Saga-age Icelanders recognized two kinds of magic (*seiðr*): good magic and evil magic. Good magic often took the form of prophecy, while evil magic was used to bring bad luck, illness, or death.

Óðinn was considered the master of seiðr. For men to practice the art was unseemly or even disgraceful, since it was considered womanly. So while the sagas tell of male practitioners of sorcery, most magic was worked by women.

Þorbjörn öngull (hook) had tried to kill Grettir Ásmundarson on numerous occasions, but on their island hideaway at Drangey, Grettir and his brother Illugi were safe from attack. Þorbjörn asked his foster-mother Þuríðr, who was well versed in sorcery, for advice.

She sought out a tree lying on the shore. She carved runes into the tree roots, smeared them with blood, and recited spells. She had the tree put out to sea with the command that it should harm Grettir in every possible way.⁵⁹

The tree drifted to Drangey. Grettir recognized it as evil and pushed it back into the water, but it only returned. Later, in anger, Grettir swung his axe at the tree, without noticing that it was the evil tree. The axe glanced off the tree and into Grettir's leg, causing a serious wound. The wound festered, and on the night that Þorbjörn öngull mounted his attack, Grettir could no longer stand to defend himself. Grettir and Illugi both died in the attack.⁶⁰

Men condemned Þorbjörn for his use of sorcery. At the following Alþing, it was decreed that Þorbjörn should sail away from Iceland and never return. At the same session, a law was passed that all practitioners of sorcery should be outlawed.⁶¹ Other episodes suggest that other punishments were imposed for sorcery in the saga age. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, Katla used sorcery to prevent weapons for harming her son Oddr Kötluon during a fight. Subsequently, when it had been discovered that Oddr had performed shameful deeds during the battle, Arnkell Þórólfsson, Þórarinn Þórólfsson, and their men came after Oddr. Katla used more sorcery to hide her son, but Þórarinn's mother, Geirríðr, showed the men how to break the spells. Geirríðr put a sealskin bag over Katla's head, and Oddr was quickly discovered. Oddr was hanged, and Katla was stoned to death for her sorcery.⁶²

When magic was used for good, sorcerers were admired. *Eiríks saga rauða* tells of Þorbjörg, a *völva* (seeress) in Greenland. During a time of famine, Þorkell asked her to foretell when the hard times would end.

The saga tells of the preparations for the prophecy. A high seat was prepared with a cushion stuffed with chicken feathers. At the feast, Þorbjörg was served a meal prepared from the hearts of all the animals available on the farm, along with porridge made from kid's milk.

The next day, Þorbjörg prepared to prophesize. She asked for women who knew the chants called *Varðlokur* (ward songs) needed for the magic rites. Only Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir stepped forward. She had been taught the chants, but as a Christian, she wanted no part in the magic rites.⁶³

Þorkell urged Guðríðr to perform the chants, and she agreed. Many things were revealed to Þorbjörg. She foretold that the hard times would improve in spring, that Guðríðr would return to Iceland, and that many long and worthy branches would descend from her. All the prophecies came to pass.

Dreams

The northern people set great store by their dreams. People remembered and related their dreams so that others could interpret them and foretell the future.⁶⁴

Brennu-Njáls saga tells of a time when Gunnarr Hámundarson grew very tired while traveling with his brothers, Kolskeggr and Hjörtr. They stopped, and Gunnarr fell asleep. Kolskeggr and Hjörtr could see that their brother was dreaming, and Hjörtr wanted to wake him. "Don't do that," Kolskeggr said. "Let him dream his dream."⁶⁵

When he awoke, Gunnarr related his dream, which foretold of the ambush of the three brothers and of Hjörtr's death.

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir had been troubled by dreams throughout the winter, as is told in *Laxdæla saga*. When she met her kinsman Gestr Oddleifsson at the baths at Laugar, she asked him to interpret the dreams. Gestr listened as Guðrún related her four dreams, and then he interpreted them as Guðrún's being married to and widowed from a succession of four men. Guðrún turned a deep red, but she thanked Gestr for his interpretation. "I'll have much to think about if all this comes to pass."⁶⁶

The Conversion

Iceland's first national crisis came in the first century of the Commonwealth era. During the 10th century, Scandinavians were increasingly feeling the influence of Christianity through their European trading partners, who had already converted. Through those contacts, Christianity won growing numbers of Norse converts, bringing a new source of conflict into Scandinavian lands.

Iceland's conversion to Christianity provides a sharply focused example of Icelandic law at work. Elsewhere, Christianity was embraced as a matter of faith, or imposed by force, whether from above or from outside. In Iceland, acceptance of the new religion was a matter of law. It was the kind of carefully crafted compromise that was characteristic of saga-age Iceland.

Before Iceland was settled, the Scandinavians were generally heathens. Some adopted the Christian faith through their contacts with traders from other lands. Viking traders might be baptized, fully accepting the new faith, or they might receive the *prima signatio*, the first rite of initiation. Either would have permitted Christian traders to conduct business with a Norse trader.⁶⁷

Some Norse people adopted the new faith as a result of settling in lands that were already Christian, such as the British Isles. Others may have been influenced by Christian missionaries who started visiting Scandinavia in the early part of the 9th century.⁶⁸

It was not necessarily difficult for Norse heathens to adopt Christianity.

Many simply accepted Christ as yet another god to be worshiped along with all the other gods in their pantheon. *Landnámabók* tells of Helgi enn magri (the lean), an early settler in Iceland.⁶⁹ He adopted Christianity when he lived in the Hebrides as a young man. He prayed to Christ when he was on land (and therefore relatively safe), but prayed to Þórr when at sea (and things were more dangerous). When he arrived in Iceland, he called on Þórr to guide him to a favorable place for him to settle in the new land. He called his new home *Krist-snes* (Christ's headland).⁷⁰

In Iceland, the Christian settlers lost their faith within a generation, according to the sagas. Auðr djúpauðga was Christian when she arrived. She erected crosses on the hills near her farm and prayed there every day. Yet, after her death, her kinsmen built a pagan temple on the site and held sacrifices there.⁷¹ *Landnámabók* says that for the 120 years before the adoption of Christianity, Iceland was primarily heathen.⁷²

It's likely that the literary sources oversimplify. Some awareness of Christianity must surely have persisted in Iceland. *Landnámabók* tells of the early Christian settler, Ketill enn fíflski (the foolish). He settled in Kirkjubœr (Church Farm) in the south. No heathens were permitted to live there.⁷³ Generations later, when the Christian missionary Þangbrandr visited Kirkjubœr, he found that the residents had remained true to the faith.⁷⁴

The story of Iceland's conversion is told in *Kristni saga*, *Íslendingabók*, and in some of the *Sagas of Icelanders*, notably *Brennu-Njáls saga*. The story begins in Norway. King Hákon Haraldsson of Norway was brought up as a Christian in England. When he ascended the Norwegian throne in the middle of the 10th century, he attempted to introduce Christianity throughout Norway. Churches were built and missionaries were brought from England, but the new religion was not widely adopted.⁷⁵

There was little further acceptance of the new faith until Óláfr Tryggvason seized the Norwegian throne at the end of the 10th century. Óláfr had spent years in England on Viking raids. While there, he accepted the new faith and was baptized. His efforts to introduce Christianity in Norway were much more forceful than those of King Hákon. Those who disagreed with the king were dealt with harshly: with death, mutilation, or forceful removal from their land.⁷⁶

There were a number of reasons why the king wanted to convert Norway. He may have had a personal conviction in the religion, but he also must have seen the political advantages in uniting the country under one faith and exploiting the administrative capabilities of the church.

King Óláfr also set his sights on other lands inhabited by Norwegians, including Iceland. He pressured the Icelandic goðar to adopt Christianity and sent missionaries to Iceland. Notably, he sent the priest Þangbrandr, who preached Christianity and baptized any who accepted the faith. Several important goðar were baptized, but most opposed Þangbrandr's work and refused baptism. Many mocked him, and Þangbrandr killed several men who com-

posed scurrilous verses about him.⁷⁷ Þangbrandr returned to Norway and briefed the king, telling him that there was no hope that the Icelanders would ever accept Christianity. The king was infuriated and said he would mutilate or kill all the Icelanders in Norway in retaliation.⁷⁸

At the Alþing meeting in 999, Hjalti Skeggjason, a Christian, mocked the goddess Freyja in a poem which he recited from the Law-Rock, likening her to a bitch in some clever word-play.⁷⁹ He was sentenced to lesser outlawry for his blasphemy, and so he left for Norway with his father-in-law, Gizurr enn hvíti (the white), an influential goði who had also converted to Christianity. They went to King Óláfr, and in exchange for the king's release of his Icelandic hostages, they agreed to return to Iceland to promote the new faith.⁸⁰

The king released most of the hostages but kept four, sons of important heathen families in Iceland. Gizurr and Hjalti returned to Iceland the following summer, in the year 1000. They traveled overland to the Alþing, gathering Christian supporters as they traveled. Christians and heathens prepared for a battle at the Alþing.⁸¹

As the Alþing convened, the Christians moved toward establishing their own separate legal system. They asked Síðu-Hallr Þorsteinsson to proclaim their law, in essence becoming their lawspeaker.⁸² Two separate Icelandic states were forming, one Christian and the other pagan.

Prominent men realized this could not be permitted to happen. Síðu-Hallr made an agreement with the heathen lawspeaker, Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði, that Þorgeirr should proclaim the law.⁸³

Þorgeirr retired to his booth, where he searched for an arrangement that could be acceptable to both heathens and Christians. *Íslendingabók* says:

Þorgeirr lay down and spread his cloak over him, and spent an entire day and the following night that way without speaking a word. And the following morning he got up again and gave word that all men should go to the Law-Rock.⁸⁴

Þorgeirr announced his plan. Henceforth, all Icelanders should be baptized and be Christian. Heathen sacrifice and worship could continue secretly, if desired, but would be penalized if witnesses came forward. Some heathen practices could continue in public.⁸⁵

It was a clever compromise. It meant that outdoors, everyone had to practice the Christian faith, but indoors, where there were no witnesses, people could practice whatever faith they preferred. Probably neither side was very satisfied, but both sides agreed to the compromise.

It was an extraordinary and unique conversion. In most lands, including Scandinavia, conversion was a slow and painful process. In Iceland, it was virtually overnight, with few lives lost. The desire to maintain the law outweighed other considerations.

In reality, there were few immediate changes. The goðar retained their power. Instead of being the intermediaries to the old heathen religion, they



When Iceland adopted Christianity, farmers tore down their pagan temples and built churches, which resembled this modern reconstruction of a saga-age church found at Geirsstaðir in east Iceland. While the sagas describe some of the temples as “mighty structures,” archaeological evidence suggests the farm churches that replaced them were quite small. Like longhouses, the church was built with turf walls and roof over an internal wooden frame, which divided the floorspace into thirds. A small altar stood at the far end, away from the door, and the benches along the side walls provided seats only for the farmer and his immediate family (author photograph).

became the intermediaries to the new church. Goðar and prominent farmers built churches on their farms, becoming the patrons of the new religion. In some cases, they tore down their temples and reused the timber to build the church.⁸⁶

But there were no priests. Foreign priests eventually arrived from England and Germany. They were able to conduct mass and church rituals, but not knowing the Icelandic language, they were unable to provide any religious instruction.

When Óláfr Haraldsson came to the throne of Norway in 1015, he undertook to promote the Christian faith in Iceland. He convinced the Icelanders to end all their heathen practices, in public and private, and he sent them priests and a bishop. By the middle of the century, a church hierarchy was in place, with an Icelandic bishop at its head.⁸⁷ Gizurr enn hvíti sent his son Ísleifr overseas for clerical training, and in 1056, Ísleifr was consecrated as bishop, with his see at his farm at Skálholt in south Iceland.

Exploration and Settlement to the West

For some saga-age people, Iceland was a place to settle down and establish a long-term home. For others, it was a launching point for expeditions farther west. Sailors set out from Iceland in the saga age to explore and settle in Greenland, and then in Vínland in North America.

Greenland

The original discovery of Greenland happened during Iceland's settlement but is mentioned only in passing in the Icelandic histories. As with Iceland, this new land was found when a sailor was blown off course. Gunnbjörn Úlfsson kráku, a relative of some of the early settlers, was driven westward beyond Iceland and came to some skerries he named Gunnbjarnarsker, from which he could see a new land.¹

The exploration and settlement of Greenland is credited to Eiríkr rauði (the red) Þorvaldsson during voyages he undertook in the 980s.² Eiríkr's background was spotty. He and his father were forced to leave Norway on account of some killings to which they were connected. Eiríkr moved to Eiríksstaðir in the Dalir district of west Iceland, where he killed a neighbor and kinsman, resulting in banishment from the district. He moved to some islands in Breiðafjörður, but in a dispute, he killed several more men. Eiríkr and his men were outlawed.³

Eiríkr's options were limited. He couldn't return to Norway, as many other outlaws did; he had already been expelled from there. He couldn't stay in Iceland, where men were already hunting for him. Exploration west across the ocean was one of his few viable options.

While in hiding, Eiríkr outfitted a ship. He sailed westward, saying that he meant to search for the land that Gunnbjörn had sighted, and that he would return if he found it.⁴

Eiríkr and his crew found their way to Greenland, and they spent three

years there, exploring the coast, naming landmarks, and searching for suitable places to settle. Eiríkr built a house in one of the fjords. They found signs of human habitation, including skin-boats and stone tools. Ari Þorgilsson, the author of *Íslendingabók*, concluded that these finds were from the same people who later were found in Vínland.⁵

The Icelanders called these native people *skrælingar*, a term whose etymology is unclear. It was probably a derisive term, meaning “coarse fellow” or perhaps “barbarian.”⁶ It’s unlikely that Eiríkr and his party encountered any *skrælingar* in person. At the time of the settlement of Greenland, the native Inuit lived much further to the north.⁷ Face-to-face encounters with the *skrælingar* had to wait for later voyages further west.

Eiríkr returned to Iceland. The following year, he set out to colonize the new land. He called it Greenland, “thinking that people would be more likely to settle in a place with an attractive name.”⁸

Twenty-five ships set out for Greenland from Iceland, around the year 985. Only fourteen arrived.⁹ The new settlers took land in two settlements, called the Eastern and Western Settlements (*Eystri-byggð* and *Vestri-byggð*), although both are located on the southwest coast of Greenland.

Written sources suggest that 190 farms existed in Greenland in the Viking age,¹⁰ but archaeological remains of more than 450 farms have been found.¹¹ Regardless of the exact number, the population of the Greenland colony could never have been very large, perhaps 4,000 inhabitants or so.¹² The Greenlanders based their laws on the Icelandic model and held an annual þing meeting at Garðar.¹³

Agriculture was even less productive in Greenland than it had been in Iceland. Animal husbandry, fishing, and hunting were the main occupations. Greenland’s lack of timber and iron also contributed to the difficulty of making a living there. The main trading partners were Norway and Iceland. Exports included hides and skins, including ropes made from walrus hide, which were highly prized.¹⁴

The Western Settlement survived until at least the middle of the 14th century, and the Eastern Settlement to around the middle of the 15th century.¹⁵ The climate deteriorated significantly around that time, known as the Little Ice Age. Archaeological evidence suggests the Greenlanders stuck to the Nordic lifestyles, which were no longer tenable in the worsening climate. The Inuit thrived, but the Norse settlements died out.¹⁶

Vínland

The story of the exploration of Vínland is a continuation of the Greenland story and is told in *Eiríks saga rauða* and in *Grœnlendinga saga*. The stories as told in the two sagas differ from one another in significant ways.

The Icelandic Bjarni Herjólfsson was a merchant and was accustomed to spending alternate years in Norway on trading expeditions, and in Iceland with his father. When he returned to Iceland one summer, he was dismayed to find his father had sold his land and emigrated to Greenland along with Eiríkr rauði. Bjarni decided to join his father that season, as he was accustomed, and he sailed westward with his crew. Even Bjarni recognized that the decision to sail to an unknown location that late in the season was foolhardy.¹⁷

Bjarni and his crew were blown far off course by a storm and came to a new land. In an amazing feat of navigation and seamanship, Bjarni was able to sail back to his father's new farm in Greenland.

After the storm abated and Bjarni could see the sun, he realized he was too far south, so he sailed northward. Three times he spotted new land to the west, but each time, Bjarni decided against landing. He realized it was not Greenland and was therefore not interested. When he reached the proper latitude, he turned east and sailed for four days, making landfall where his father had established his farm.¹⁸

In Greenland, and later in Norway, Bjarni told his story. People criticized Bjarni for his lack of curiosity about the new land, and many showed considerable interest in investigating the new land he had found.¹⁹

Leifr Eiríksson, the son of Eiríkr rauði, decided to mount an expedition to this new land in the year 995. He bought Bjarni's ship and gathered a crew of thirty-five from Greenland. Leifr followed Bjarni's route in reverse. Their first landfall was rocky and desolate, and Leifr called it *Helluland* (Stone-slab Land). The second landfall was forested, so he called it *Markland* (Forest Land). They wintered over at their third landfall. They built booths, and later houses, at a site that subsequent visitors from Greenland called *Leifsbúðir* (Leifr's booths). Because grapes and vines were found during explorations of the new land, Leifr called it *Vinland* (Wineland).²⁰ He returned to Greenland in the spring with a full cargo of grapes and timber.²¹

Leifr's success in Vinland encouraged others to make the voyage. Þorvaldr Eiríksson, Leifr's brother, made a voyage, stopping at Leifsbúðir, where he and his crew stayed the winter. While exploring during the second summer, they came across three hide-covered boats with men hiding underneath them. Seemingly without cause, they captured and killed all but one of the men, who managed to escape. The incident probably did not start their relationship with the native people on a very good note.

Later, the natives returned in great numbers, and the Greenlanders defended themselves from on board their ship. Þorvaldr was killed by an arrow and was buried at the site where he had hoped to settle in Vinland. His crew returned to Greenland.²²

Another brother, Þorsteinn Eiríksson, made an abortive trip to retrieve Þorvaldr's body, but he was blown back to Greenland and never reached Vinland.²³

The most ambitious expedition to Vínland was led by Þorfinnr karlsefni Þórðarson. At least three ships were involved, and over one hundred men and a small number of women joined the expedition.²⁴ Þorfinnr brought a variety of farm animals and tools, intending to settle in Vínland if he could.²⁵ While in Vínland, Þorfinnr's wife, Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir, gave birth to a son, Snorri, the first European child born in the new world. They sailed past Furðustrandir (Wonder Beaches) and wintered at Straumsfjörðr, where they unloaded their cargo and livestock and settled in. The following year, they sailed further south, to Hóp.

The expeditions ran into growing difficulties with the natives. At first they were trade partners, exchanging their pelts and furs for dairy products and red cloth. The natives had never seen iron tools and weapons before but must have realized their value. The Greenlanders refused to trade their iron weapons for native goods.

The natives mounted increasing numbers of attacks on the settlers, who realized they would be under constant threat of attack. Þorfinnr decided to return home. Despite all that the land had to offer the settlers, the number and severity of the attacks made it seem unlikely they could ever settle there profitably.²⁶ The small Greenland settlements could not support a Vínland settlement that was several weeks' sail away.²⁷

Þorfinnr and his party returned to Greenland. The following year, he, his wife, and their son sailed to Iceland and settled at Glaumbær in Skagafjörðr in the north of Iceland.²⁸ His expedition was the last recorded attempt to establish a Norse settlement in Vínland. However, Greenlanders and Icelanders appear to have made voyages to North America for centuries afterwards, to pick up raw materials unavailable in their home lands, such as timber. Those voyagers probably went no further than was necessary, which was probably to Markland.

The Icelandic records (*Konungsannáll*) state that Bishop Eiríkr upsi Gnúpson of Greenland sailed to Vínland in 1121. The record does not state whether he found it, or even if he returned. The last voyage reported in Icelandic historical documents (*Skálholtsannáll*) was in 1347, when a ship returning from Markland to Greenland was blown off course and landed in Iceland with seventeen men on board.²⁹

Archaeological evidence also suggests continued visits to North America; Norse artifacts have been found at Native American sites. A coin found at a Dorset site in Maine was minted in Norway during the reign of King Óláfr kyrri Haraldsson, between 1065 and 1080.³⁰ Perhaps it was lost or traded there during one of the later Vínland voyages.³¹

Studies of wooden Viking ship parts found in Greenland show that they were made of larch (*Larix*) native to Siberia and North America. It's possible the Greenlanders used driftwood, but it's just as possible they went to Markland or Vínland to cut their own fresh timber.³²



Incontrovertible evidence of a Viking settlement was found at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada. The site is thought to be the location of Leifsbúðir, where Leifr Eiríksson built temporary dwellings. A modern recreation of the houses found on the site is shown in the photograph. The location of Vínland, where Greenlanders and Icelanders explored and tried to settle, is unknown but was certainly farther south (author photograph).

The Norse voyages to Vínland may have been known elsewhere in medieval Europe. European authors mention remote lands to the west, including Adam of Bremen in the 11th century. Some scholars have suggested that knowledge of Vínland persisted in European seaports in the 15th century. Christopher Columbus claims in a letter to have visited Iceland, where, perhaps he heard stories about Vínland.

In the month of February, and in the year 1477, I navigated as far as the island of Tile [Thule], a hundred leagues; and to this island, which is as large as England, the English, especially those of Bristol, go with merchandise.³³

Neither of these sources is considered very reliable, and it remains uncertain how much knowledge of Vínland filtered outside of the Norse lands in the medieval era.

In modern times, many have speculated on the location of Vínland. After a systematic search, Helge Ingstad found a promising site at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada in 1960. The site was thoroughly investigated over the next two decades and was discovered to be the remains of a Norse community dating from around the year 1000.³⁴

The organization of L'Anse aux Meadows suggests a carefully planned venture. There are the remains of three longhouses, the largest about 65 feet (20 meters) long, as well as several workshops, an iron forge, an iron smelter, and a charcoal kiln. A supply of new iron rivets and pieces of worked wood were found, ready for use as repair materials for a Viking ship.³⁵ Other finds included a spindle whorl, used for spinning thread, along with a bone needle, indicating that women were present at the site.

Just as telling were some of the things not found. There is little in the way of a midden. There were only small accumulations of refuse, such as incinerated animal bones, indicating that the site was not occupied for more than a few years.³⁶ The remains of the buildings show no signs of stone footings, indicating that the buildings were meant to be temporary. There are no burials, indicating that no one died while staying at the site. There are no signs of domesticated animals or agricultural activity, indicating that everything the residents ate was either brought with them, or else hunted or gathered on the spot. Overall, it appears that the site was not occupied continuously, and although both men and women lived there, there was probably nothing like normal family life at the site.³⁷

Although clearly a Norse site, the evidence suggests that the L'Anse aux Meadows site is not Vinland. Even with the intervening climate changes, the site is too far north to support the vegetation described in the sagas. Finds at the site included butternuts (*Juglans cinerea*), which grow only in regions much farther south. Butternuts and wild grapes grow in the same regions and ripen at the same time. The explorers who picked butternuts in Vinland and returned with them to L'Anse aux Meadows may very well have picked grapes as well.³⁸

L'Anse aux Meadows was most probably a ship repair station, a base camp for exploration, and a waypoint on the voyage to Vinland. It may well have been Leifsbúðir, where the sagas say Leifr Eiríksson built his winter camp.³⁹ From the longhouses, one can see across the entire width of the Strait of Belle Isle, which leads to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Because of its location, whoever controlled L'Anse aux Meadows also controlled the approaches to Vinland and its rich natural resources.⁴⁰

Since L'Anse aux Meadows isn't Vinland, where was Vinland? There is insufficient evidence at this time for anything other than a guess. Both literary and archaeological evidence implies that Norse visitors traveled farther south, to warmer climates. Scholars have suggested sites for Leifr's Vinland and for Þorfinnr's Hóp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and along the St. Lawrence River as far inland as Quebec, as well as along the eastern seaboard of Canada and the United States, even as far south as New York City.⁴¹ Until additional evidence is found, the mystery of Vinland endures.

Iceland's Heritage

The year 1066 is frequently used as a convenient marker for the end of the Viking age. In that year, at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in England, the Norwegian King Haraldr harðráði (hard-ruler) was repulsed and killed as he attempted to reclaim a portion of England. It was the last major Viking incursion into Europe.

In Iceland, the events of 1066 passed leaving scarcely a ripple. The free-state government remained stable. The power remained in the hands of a number of goðar, who, in general, each had similar numbers of þingmenn and thus similar power and similar levels of resources to call upon in case of disputes.¹

The situation began to change in the 12th century, and the balance of power among the goðar started to shift. Individual farmers and chieftains accumulated more wealth and more property, and hence more influence and authority. In many cases, this concentration of power was augmented by control of church estates and the wealth that went with them. The goðar were no longer the leaders and protectors of their þingmenn, but rather had become their rulers.²

Individual goðar gathered under them more and more goðorð, becoming *stórgoðar* (big chieftains). By the middle of the 12th century, civil unrest and violent conflict between competing *stórgoðar* was nearly continuous.³ At the start of the 13th century, the political power in Iceland was in the hands of just six families.⁴ One of these families was comprised of the descendants of Sturla Þórðarson, so the age is often called the Sturlunga era.

At the same time, King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway was taking an increasing interest in Icelandic affairs. The king was aided by the church in Norway, with whom the king had cooperated to their mutual benefit throughout his reign. Norwegian bishops were placed in control of the church in Iceland. The king was also helped by Norwegian merchants, who by this time controlled virtually all of Iceland's overseas trade. Without any native timber with which to build ships, few Icelanders owned their own vessels, leaving the country dependent on foreign shipping for the imports it required for survival. Norwegian merchants and churchmen served as conduits for information and power on behalf of the Norwegian king.⁵



Snorri Sturluson, the saga author, poet, diplomat, and chieftain, lived and was assassinated at his farm in Reykholt in the first part of the 13th century. Today, the farm is the site of Snorrastofa, a museum and a medieval research center (author photograph).

In 1220, Snorri Sturluson, one of the most powerful of the *stórgoðar*, became the king's vassal, and agreed to take steps to bring Iceland under Norway's rule.⁶ One after another, many of the other *stórgoðar* became the king's retainers,⁷ believing they might gain an advantage against competing *goðar* by having the support of the king, as well as that of the church and the merchants.

Snorri was assassinated by King Hákon's agents in 1241, in part for not moving quickly enough to bring Iceland under Norway's rule. The king claimed Snorri's *goðorð* and began entering more actively into Icelandic politics.⁸ By the middle of the century, he had obtained nearly all the *goðorð* under his personal control. It was only a matter of time before the free state totally collapsed.

King Hákon appointed the Icelander Gizurr Þorvaldsson as earl of Iceland in 1251. His command to Gizurr was to restore peace by bringing Iceland under the king's rule.⁹ When Gizurr didn't act quickly enough, the king sent several of his Norwegian retainers to speed the process.

At the Alþing in 1262, which was attended only by men from the North and the South Quarters, Gizurr convinced the assembled *goðar* to accept the agreement now called the Old Covenant (*Gamli sáttmáli*), an oath that guaranteed the Icelanders various rights in exchange for becoming subjects of the king.¹⁰ Why did the Icelanders accept this covenant and give up their independence? Clearly, from the saga evidence, they were reluctant to do so.¹¹

There is no clear answer. Perhaps they hoped that, after a century of bloodshed and unrest, they were buying peace.¹² Economic considerations were probably equally important. The covenant guaranteed a minimum number of ships each year, ensuring that the trade required for Iceland's survival would continue.

Over the next two years, the remainder of Iceland also accepted the agreement. The king consolidated his power and introduced new law codes. The Quarter Courts and Fifth Court were eliminated. The office of *goði* was abolished, and power was vested in the hands of the king's representatives.¹³ The Alþing still met as a court of appeals, but it was made up of appointees of the king.¹⁴ The Icelandic free state was finished.

Under the Norwegian crown, peace largely returned to Iceland, but the island entered a period of decline that lasted nearly six centuries. Always on the periphery of Europe, Iceland became increasingly marginal.

Ironically, Iceland's poverty and isolation in the early modern era contributed to the island's cultural wealth today. Like other remote colonies, Iceland remained culturally conservative, preserving aspects of its Viking-age heritage that were lost to continental Scandinavians.

The Icelandic language itself has remained remarkably stable over the centuries. While the other Nordic languages evolved over time, especially through exposure to other cultures, Icelandic has changed relatively little since the end of the Viking age. The written language remains nearly the same as the language of the sagas. Indeed, Icelanders never ceased to read their medieval sagas, and as their language drifted over the centuries, deliberate reforms were implemented to harmonize the language with that of the sagas.

The stability of the language over time means that many idioms and sayings from ancient times still retain their currency in modern Icelandic. The phrase *koma einhverjum í opna skjöldu* (come upon someone in an open shield) means to take someone by surprise.¹⁵ In sword and shield combat, someone in an open shield position is poorly defended by his shield, and therefore unprepared for combat. Because of its use in medieval writings, the phrase retains its meaning despite the fact that few Icelanders these days are familiar with medieval combat techniques.

Iceland's rich body of vernacular writings from the Middle Ages, along with the relative ease with which Icelanders could read these ancient texts, made Iceland a matter of fascination to antiquarians in the 17th century, and to Romantics in the 19th century. International interest in Icelandic manuscripts was kindled by a book published by the Icelander Arngrímur Jónsson in 1609. Entitled *Crymogæa* and written in Latin, the book retells some of the stories of the saga heroes. *Crymogæa* made European scholars aware of the existence of this medieval literature, containing a wealth of information about the early history of Scandinavia, and readily accessible to any speaker of contemporary Icelandic. Thus began a very lively interest among Europeans in medieval Icelandic literature.¹⁶

Scholars combed Iceland during the 17th and 18th centuries in search of surviving manuscripts. One of the most important of these scholars was the Icelandic Árne Magnússon. Between 1702 and 1712, Árni traveled the country looking for any manuscripts that he could procure or copy.¹⁷ The manuscripts were brought to Denmark for preservation.

Regrettably, many manuscripts are known to have perished with no extant copies. In 1682, a ship on its way from Iceland to Denmark sank, carrying “a load of parchment book rubbish.”¹⁸ The Great Fire of 1728 destroyed Árni's home in Copenhagen and much of his collection, but it is thought that the most valuable vellum manuscripts were saved.¹⁹

Beginning in 1971 and continuing over a period of more than two decades, the manuscripts were repatriated to Iceland for safekeeping at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar (Árne Magnússon Institute) in Reykjavík.

The Romantic movement intensified the interest in Icelandic literature, since admiration of the medieval era and a “return to roots” were prominent components of Romanticism.²⁰ The stories of the independent-minded Vikings and the society they created in Iceland resonated strongly. Romanticism brought increasing awareness of Iceland's unique position among the Scandinavian countries as the repository of a shared cultural legacy.

This Romantic interest in Iceland extended beyond Scandinavia to the German-speaking lands, playing a part in 19th century efforts to forge a united German state. The nationalist movement required a sense of national identity, so material that spoke to the Germanic cultural heritage fell on very fertile ground.²¹

Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm led the study of old Norse literature in Germany, using Icelandic materials to promote the kinship between Scandinavians and Germans and to advance German unification. The brothers did not differentiate between German and Germanic peoples, a blurring of the facts that served their purposes well, conflating the German cultural heritage with that of other lands.²²

Artists as well as scholars looked to Iceland for inspiration. Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, nominally based on the medieval German *Nibelungenlied*, actually owes much more to the version of the Nibelung legend preserved in Icelandic eddic poetry and in the *Völsunga saga*.²³

In the first part of the 20th century, Icelanders began making progress as they agitated for independence from Denmark. Amidst these events, the Viking heritage remained a matter of political importance. Scholarly editions of Iceland's medieval literature were being prepared by the *Hið íslenska fornritafélag* (The Old Icelandic Texts Society) using a standardized spelling that conformed to the spelling conventions in the manuscripts, rather than those of modern Icelandic. The archaic spelling put off modern readers, so plans were announced to publish modern popular editions. These plans were blocked in 1941 by the Alþingi, which passed legislation stipulating that only the Icelandic state had



The sagas remain part of the bedrock of Icelandic culture in modern times, with abundant references in place names, personal names, street names, and corporate names and identities. Re-enactors at historical sites throughout Iceland, including here at Lögberg in Þingvellir, routinely attract considerable visitor interest (author photograph).

the right to publish medieval Icelandic literature. Supporters of the measure reasoned that the literature was common property that should be vested in the state on behalf of the citizens.²⁴

The law was struck down by the Icelandic Supreme Court, clearing the way for popular editions with modern spelling. Some of these editions were edited by Halldór Laxness, the Icelandic novelist and Nobel laureate.²⁵ In subsequent years, the sagas have appeared in many forms in Iceland: scholarly editions with extensive notes and commentary, inexpensive popular editions, comic books, graphic novels, and children's versions. In Iceland today, the sagas remain part of the bedrock of Icelandic culture, with abundant references in Icelandic place names, personal names, street names, and in corporate names and identities.

The 20th century saw remarkable changes in Iceland: in the space of a few generations, the country progressed by a millennium. It is safe to say that the majority of 19th century Icelanders lived in circumstances significantly worse than those of the 9th century settlers. Standard of living, self-esteem, and joy of life all had fallen considerably.²⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, even in the country's two chief industries, agriculture and fishing, there was virtually no mechanization, and almost all labor was done by hand. Iceland chose

to pull herself up by her bootstraps. Her fishing fleet and fish processing plants were modernized, resulting in new wealth from the export of processed fish and fish products. By the end of the 20th century, Iceland was modern and wealthy, technologically advanced, and enjoying one of Europe's highest per capita incomes.

These good times came to an end in the financial crash (*kreppa*) of 2008, resulting in a bone-crushing debt burden to the country. As I write these lines, the financial future for Iceland is dark and uncertain.

Ironically, this country, founded by independent-minded warrior-chieftains in the Viking age is also one of the only countries in the world without any armed forces. Perhaps most important of all, Iceland also has one of the world's highest literacy rates. It is indeed largely thanks to the enduring literary tradition of this Viking culture that today we can recapture so much of the Viking world through the sagas and poems of the Icelanders.

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Glossary

- Alþing** General Assembly, the national assembly of Iceland.
- arbitrator** (*sáttarmaðr*) A neutral third party who heard and decided cases without the need for a formal court case.
- arðr** An early form of plow used in the Viking age. It lacked the flaring sides of a modern plow, so it merely scratched a groove in the soil, rather than turning the soil over.
- ballgame** (*knattleikr*) A sporting game played outdoors by two teams using bats and a ball.
- bed-closet** (*lokrekja*) An enclosed, private space for sleeping with a lockable door, providing security and privacy. Typically, only the master of a well-to-do house and his wife slept in a bed-closet.
- benches** Seating, working, and sleeping areas made of wood and built-in to the longhouse. Normal benches (*set*) were low and deep for multiple uses, including sleeping. Sitting benches (*bekkr*) were tall and narrow, and used for sitting. The cross-bench (*pallr*), where women traditionally sat, ran across the width of the longhouse at the far end from the door.
- berserk** A warrior with exceptional ferocity and strength. Some berserks in the saga appear to have had supernatural powers.
- berserk rage** (*berserksgangr*) A frenzied state achieved by some berserks in battle.
- bondsman, bondswoman** A person unable to pay his or her debts. A bondsman or woman was classed as a slave in most legal provisions, but bond service ended with the payment of the debt.
- booths** (*búðir*) The temporary dwellings used at places only inhabited occasionally, such as at þing sites. Booths had stone foundations, and were tented over with a fabric roof when occupied.
- bowshot** (*ördrag*) A standard distance applied to a variety of legal definitions and considered to be the maximum distance of the flight of an arrow. The distance was used to define how close hostile parties could approach one another, for example.
- bride-price** (*mundr*) The wealth promised by the groom's family at the time of the betrothal to be paid to the newlyweds at the wedding.

- cairn** A pile of rocks used as a landmark for navigation on featureless landscapes.
- clinker-built** A ship construction technique in which the hull is built from the keel upward using overlapping strakes.
- coal-biter (*kolbítr*)** A lazy, idle child who lounged by the kitchen fire, “chewing” on the coals of the fire.
- Common Scandinavian** The modern name for the language spoken by the Norse people in the Viking age.
- commonwealth (*þjóðveldi*)** The independent republic form of government practiced by Icelanders from shortly after the settlement until they accepted the rule of the king of Norway in 1262–64.
- compensation (*bætr*)** Payment of tangibles or intangibles to compensate for loss of property, honor, status, or life.
- cross bench (*pallr*)** The bench at the end of the longhouse, running across its width, where women traditionally sat.
- curach** A boat made from skin stretched over twig frames, used notably by Celtic people.
- day-meal (*dagverðr*)** The first meal of the day, usually taken at mid-morning.
- dísir** Female spirits who serve as a personal guardian and fertility goddess. The actual role of the dísir is not clear based on the available sources.
- dowry (*heimanfylgja*)** The wealth promised by the bride’s family at the time of the betrothal to be paid to the newlyweds at the wedding.
- duel (*hólmganga* or *einvígi*)** A means of settling differences through one-on-one combat. Hólmganga was more formal, while einvígi was less formal.
- dwarves (*dvergar*)** Supernatural beings who are wise and skilled in crafts.
- earl (*jarl*)** A man of high rank found in most of the Nordic lands, but not in Iceland. They could be independent of the king, or subordinate.
- eddic poetry** A form of Viking-age poetry written by anonymous poets using simple diction which tell tales of gods and heroes.
- ell (*alin*, *öln*)** A unit of measure of length, corresponding to the distance between the elbow and the end of the longest finger. An ell is considered to be 20 inches (50 centimeters).
- elves (*álfar*)** Supernatural beings who are close confederates of the gods.
- exposure (*bera út*)** Rejection of a new-born infant. The infant was placed outside, exposed to the elements, until death ensued.
- farmer (*bóndi*)** A man who owns land and livestock, as opposed to a man who labors for others.
- feud** Violent conflict with a set of written and unwritten rules which served to manage and contain violence resulting from disagreements.
- fire hall (*eldhús*)** A room or building in which food was prepared, which might well be used for many other purposes as well.
- fixed goods** Personal property which could not be easily moved, as opposed to movable goods. Fixed goods included land and buildings.

fjord (*fjörðr*) A submerged glacial valley. A valley formed by a glacier tends to be U-shaped, and when it fills with water, the resulting body of water tends to be very deep with land that rises steeply, directly from the water's edge.

follower (*hirðmaðr*) A member of the king's inner circle.

fostering (*fóstr*) A legal arrangement in which one family raised the child of another family. Fostering created bonds between families that could be stronger than marriage or blood.

freed slave (*lausingi*) A former slave who had either bought his freedom, or had been granted freedom by his owner. A freed slave never was fully free.

full outlawry (*skóggangr*) A punishment in which the convicted man was literally put outside the protection of the law and treated as if he were already dead.

fylgja A personal guardian spirit in the shape of an animal.

games (*leikar*) Sporting games, typically played outside by teams of players.

games meeting (*leikmót*) A multi-day festival called by prominent men to bring people together to play games.

ghosts (*draugar*) Spirits of dead people who return to harm and harass the living.

giants (*jötnar*) Fearsome and threatening supernatural beings who would upset the order of the world.

goði (chieftain) A local leader with legal, administrative, and religious responsibilities.

goðorð (chieftaincy) The office of the goði, which was considered private property. Several people could own a goðorð, but only one could serve as goði.

hack silver Silver articles, such as jewelry or coins, which have been cut to make up the required weight for a transaction.

hall (*skáli*) The main farmhouse on Icelandic farms, and the largest room in these farmhouses. The hall was used for eating, sleeping, work, and play.

handshake (*handsal*) The conclusion of a business transaction, signaling the transference of the goods, or rights, or responsibilities.

haystack wall (*stakkgarðr*) A stone wall against which hay was stacked for drying.

hersir A local leader or chieftain in Norway, but not in Iceland.

high-seat (*öndvegi, háseti*) The place of honor on the bench, where the master of the household sat.

high-seat pillars (*öndvegissúlur*) Thought to refer to the pillars of the house located on either side of the high-seat.

homefield (*tún*) The walled-in hay field immediately adjacent to the house, where the best hay was grown.

homespun (*vaðmál*) Woolen cloth of a standard quality and width used as a form of currency in the saga age.

homespun cloak (*varafeldr*) A shaggy cloak, often used as trade goods.

honor (*drengskapr*) A measure of social credibility.

horse fight (*hestavíg*) A sporting event in which stallions were goaded to fight against one another.

hreppr A word used to mean either a district, or the mutual insurance pact among the farmers of a district.

hundred (*hundrað*) Typically, a “long hundred,” meaning one hundred and twenty.

húskarl Literally, a house-man. In Iceland, the term applied to hired hands who worked the farm. In Norway, the term referred to the king or earl’s household men who provided armed support.

Íslendingabók (The Book of Icelanders) A 12th century Icelandic book relating the history of early Iceland.

karl A man, and typically a free farmer.

kenning A poetic paraphrase and a significant part of the art of skaldic poetry.

knörr A Viking age cargo ship, propelled primarily by sail, and optimized for maximum cargo capacity.

Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements) A 12th century Icelandic book relating the discovery and settlement of Iceland.

land-spirits (*landvættir*) Spirits on whom the prosperity of the land depends.

Law Rock (*Lögberg*) The site at Þingvellir where the law-speaker presided. Speeches and announcements were made from this location, and the law-speaker recited the law from here.

Law-Council (*Lögretta*) The legislative body of Alþing, comprised of the goðar, the law-speaker, and a few others.

law-speaker (*lögsögumaðr*) A man appointed by the Law-Council who presided over the activities at Alþing. While he had influence, he did not rule.

lesser outlawry (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) A punishment in which the convicted man was banished for three years.

longhouse (*skáli, langhús*) The typical house style used during the saga age, with a characteristic outward bulge in the long walls. The house used an internal wood frame set on stone footings.

longship (*langskip*) A type of war ship. Typically only the largest warships were referred to as longships.

magic (*seiðr*) A ritual performed by women which either could influence people or the elements, or could predict the future. For men to practice seiðr was unseemly, since it was effeminate.

magician (*seiðmaðr*) A man who practices magic.

mark (*mörk*) A unit of weight, equivalent to eight ounces.

movable goods Personal property which could be easily moved, as opposed to fixed goods. Movable goods included tools, livestock, home furnishings, and the like.

Moving Days (*fardagar*) The four days in May during which one was permitted to change his legal residence.

nálbinding The modern name for the knotting technique used to make woolen articles such as socks, mittens, and hats in the Viking age.

neighbor (*búi*) People who met certain legal requirements who were called upon to observe, and in some cases, to judge the testimony presented in a case.

night-meal (*náttverðr*) The second (and last) meal of the day, usually taken in the evening.

óðal Possessions and wealth, notably the wealth that was passed from generation to generation within a family.

ounces (*aurar*) A unit of weight equivalent to 27 grams, and nearly the same as the modern avoirdupois ounce.

ounce-units The equivalent to one ounce of silver in other forms of legal tender, such as homespun. During the saga age, the exchange rate between silver and homespun varied by more than a factor of ten.

outlaw (*útlagi*) A person sentenced to be placed outside the protection of the law for his crimes.

papar The Irish monks and hermits found in Iceland by the earliest settlers, according to the literary sources. The archaeological sources have not yielded any trace of such people in Iceland.

peace straps (*fríðbönd*) Straps, notably on the scabbard of a sword, which prevented the weapon from being drawn in anger in places where its use was forbidden.

porch (*anddyri*) The entrance room in a longhouse, located between the front door and the living space. The porch served as a storage room, equipment locker, mudroom, bath house, and as an “airlock” to keep cold outside drafts from entering the living space.

private settlement (*sátt*) A case settled privately between the parties involved.

prophetess (*völva*) A woman with supernatural powers who can foresee the future.

quarter (*fjórðungur*) One of the four administrative districts in saga-age Iceland. The quarters were named for the four cardinal points of the compass.

retainer (*hirðmaðr*) A king’s man, and typically, a member of the king’s bodyguard.

retting The process by which fibers are released from the stem of a plant such as flax, and the first step in making items such as linen fabric.

riving A technique for creating planks from logs by splitting the logs apart radially using wedges driven into the log.

sacrifice (*blót*) A feast and celebration in honor of the gods.

saga A prose narrative recording historical events. A wide range of sagas were written in medieval Iceland, narrating events from ancient to contemporary.

Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) The modern term for the group of

- medieval Icelandic sagas about Icelandic farmers and chieftains taking place from the settlement to the end of the 11th century.
- scorn-pole** (*níðstöng*) A public expression of slander, erected to shame and mock the intended victim(s).
- self-judgment** (*sjálfdæmi*) A legal settlement in which both parties agreed in advance that one side should set the terms for the settlement.
- settlement** (*landnám*) The period in Iceland's history when the land was claimed and settled, usually taken to mean the years 874 through 930.
- settlement layer** (*landnámslag*) A distinctive volcanic ash layer laid down over Iceland around the time of the first settlement, used to help date artifacts found in the soil.
- shape-shifter** (*hamrammr*) Men, who in their battle frenzy, took on the characteristics of wild animals. A notable shape-shifter was Kveld-Úlfr Bjálfa-son, the grandfather of Egill Skalla-Grímsson. Many berserks are described as shape-shifters.
- shieling** (*sel*) High pastures, and the temporary living quarters located in those pastures. During the summer, livestock were driven from the farm to these higher pastures. Dairy products from the shieling were brought back down to the farm for storage.
- skaldic poetry** A form of Viking-age poetry written by named poets using complex diction which tell tales of contemporary events.
- skerry** A small, rocky islet, and often a serious hazard to navigation.
- skrælingar** The native people encountered by Norse explorers in Vínland (North America).
- skyr** Sour curds. Skyr could be stored for long periods of time and was one means of storing excess dairy production into the winter, when cows stopped giving milk.
- slave** (*þræll*) A person who is the property of another.
- sleep sack** (*húðfat*) A leather sack in which people slept during the night and stored their belongings during the day. Sleep sacks were typically used while away from home, notably onboard a ship, or at a þing meeting in a booth.
- soapstone** A soft, easily carved stone used for a variety of cookware and other vessels in saga-age Iceland.
- sour whey** (*súrr*) A dairy product used as a preservative for a variety of other foodstuffs.
- sprinkling with water** (*ausa vatni*) A part of the infant acceptance ritual, in which the father takes the new-born infant on his knee, gives the infant a name, and sprinkles the infant with water.
- stofa** A sitting room in a larger houses, thought to be where women did their work during the day.
- strake** A wooden plank used to form the hull of a ship.
- summons** (*stefna*) A legal procedure by which a man was called to answer for his offense before a court.

sworn brotherhood (*fóstbræðralag*) A ritual arrangement which created strong bonds between men. Unlike fostering, the arrangements were made by the men themselves, rather than by their parents.

temple (*hof*) A place where pagans worshipped and sacrificed, which may have been a special building, but may have been a part of a normal home, or even outdoors.

tephrochronology The dating of artifacts by their position relative to unique, datable layers of volcanic ash.

þættir Short prose narratives, the medieval equivalent of a short story.

þing A legal assembly, where men met to make laws, judge laws, and set penalties for infractions.

þingmenn A goði's supporters. Þingmenn were obliged to travel with the goði to þing and provide armed support as needed.

troll An evil, hostile spirit. Only in the later medieval literature from well after the saga age do trolls take on the characteristics commonly seen in later folk tales.

vagrant (*göngumaðr*) A person with no fixed abode.

Varangian Guard (*Væringjar*) An elite corps made up of Scandinavians who served the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople. Some Icelandic saga heroes served in the Varangian Guard.

Várþing (spring assembly) The local assembly, held in the spring, and attended by the goðar in the district and all their þingmenn.

weapon taking (*vápnatak*) Closing an assembly. It is so called because in earlier times in Scandinavia (but probably not in Iceland), the close of a þing was marked by taking up weapons and clashing them.

wergild ring (*baugr*) The atonement paid by the killer's family to the victim's family.

wether A castrated ram.

Winter Nights (*veturnætr*) The end of summer and the beginning of winter, occurring around the middle of October. Winter Nights was a time for feasting, celebrations, games festivals, and weddings to take advantage of the abundant food stores.

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Appendix.

Sagas for Outlanders

The Icelandic word for foreigner, *útlendingur*, translates literally to *outlander*. For outlanders interested in reading the sagas in translation, I offer a few suggestions.

The *Sagas of Icelanders* remain engaging, enjoyable yarns for a modern reader. They tell compelling stories about fully-rendered and complex characters. The stories touch the reader's heartstrings with tales of lost love and missed opportunities. There are comedies and tragedies and soap operas and adventure stories.

But the sagas are written in a style very different from that of a modern novel. A reader diving in to a saga plucked at random from the corpus may quickly find him or herself lost at sea, amongst all the characters, seemingly introduced willy-nilly, and by the opaque plot conventions that the saga authors used as shorthand to convey important information to their contemporary readers.

So, when I am asked what saga to read first, I tend not to recommend the classics, the most outstanding sagas, such as *Brennu-Njáls saga*, which can be overwhelming in its complexity. Instead, I recommend a minor saga, a short novella with a small *dramatis personæ* that can be read in a single sitting. I also strongly recommend some English translations over others.

Translations

During a conference in Iceland, a group of scholars of old Norse literature decided among themselves to embark on a massive project: a new translation into English of all of the *Sagas of Icelanders*.

They accomplished their goal. In my opinion, it's fabulous and has become the standard English translation of the sagas. The text reads like modern English, and both the broad meanings and the subtle shadings of the Icelandic original have been conveyed by the translators. Unusual and unfamiliar terms are ren-

dered into English uniformly across all the sagas, with glossaries and explanatory material to describe unfamiliar concepts. The work was published in 1997 in Iceland by Leifur Eiriksson Publishing.¹

More recently, some of these translations have been republished in the Penguin Classics series, a more affordable and more widely available option. It is these translations that I recommend to new readers. *The Sagas of Icelanders* is a large, inexpensive volume containing translations of nine of the best sagas, along with additional interpretive and explanatory text.²

Penguin Classics also has some earlier translations in their catalog. If the later translation is available, I recommend it over the earlier version.

I recommend that readers avoid the widely available on-line versions from the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. These versions are saddled with the burden of stilted language and romantic embellishments. In addition, scholarly research on both the Icelandic originals and the English translations has advanced considerably in the last century. I urge readers not to waste their time with these translations, filled with errors, misunderstandings, and romantic nonsense.

Reading the Sagas

I recommend that a reader ease into this project. The sagas have a different style, and a complex approach to developing the plot and characters. People who jump right in to some of the most famous of the sagas may find themselves in over their heads and not enjoying the experience.

I recommend that readers start with *The Sagas of Icelanders* collection. Read some of the introductory comments. Start with the two Vinland sagas (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*, and *Eirik the Red's Saga*). They're simple, straight-forward stories without a lot of characters or plot complexities.

Read *The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*, considered by some to be the best novella ever written in any language. Move on to *Gisli Sursson's Saga*, one of



The sagas were preserved for us to read in medieval books, hand-written with pen and ink on vellum. Many of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts are held by the Árna Magnússonar stofnun í íslenskum fræðum (Arni Magnusson Institute) in Reykjavík (courtesy Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík).

the outlaw sagas and a personal favorite of mine. Try *Egil's saga*. Egill was a Viking, a brawler, an adventurer, and a poet. Despite his having engaged in heroic adventures played out all across northern Europe, Egill lived to be over 80 years old, a troublemaker up to his last days. Read *The Saga of the Confederates*, a laugh-out-loud funny comedy.

At that point, you'll be ready for the complex stories and the hoards of characters in something like *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, or *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, or *The Saga of the People of Laxardal*, or the grandest of all the sagas, *Njal's Saga*.

While some of the sagas are better than others, and some are more enjoyable than others, I don't think there is a single one that can be described as not worth reading.

Secondary Sources

For those who want more information about the sagas than I've provided in this book, I recommend two Icelandic books that have been translated into English: *Eddas and Sagas*³ and *Dialogues with the Viking Age*.⁴ They were written for Icelanders, and so they presuppose knowledge of Icelandic history and culture that most English-speaking readers don't possess. Regardless, I recommend them to general readers, especially if they have read this present book.

*A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*⁵ is a more advanced reference text with articles by leading scholars in the field and is highly recommended. The articles go into a great deal more depth than does my book.

Tertiary Sources

For those who want yet more information about the Viking age, there are several additional books I recommend to readers.

The author of *The Norse Myths*⁶ retells (and embellishes) the Norse mythological stories in modern English prose. This book is a good place for a casual reader to get an overview of the Norse mythology and a flavor of the Norse stories. I also recommend the delightful, pithy, and witty summaries of the myths in *Norse Myths*.⁷ The eddic poems which form the basis for the myths have been nicely rendered into English in *The Poetic Edda*.⁸

For those who want to know more about everyday life in the Viking age, *Daily Life of the Vikings*⁹ summarizes the life and material culture of the Viking people. In *Viking Age Iceland*,¹⁰ the author presents a wealth of information about Iceland's history and society during the Viking age through to the end of the free state in Iceland. The *Chronicles of the Vikings*¹¹ introduces the Viking

people in their own words, and the words of their contemporaries, providing fresh insight into Viking culture and society.

The one volume I recommend above all others to provide a casual reader with an introduction to the history, culture, and daily life of the Viking people is *The Vikings*.¹² Concise and triple distilled, it covers a broad range of topics in a very readable and approachable text.

Chapter Notes

Introduction

1. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 34, S3.

2. Adam von Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesias pontificum*, Berthard Schmiedler, ed. *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (Hanover: Hahn, 1917) p. 273, Bk. IV. (Apud illos non est rex, nisi tantum rex.)

3. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933) p. 272, ch. 78.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 272–273, ch. 78.

5. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, and Matthías Þórðarson, ed., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) p. 20, ch. 12. (...hann var heldr ósvífr í oeskunni, ok var hann af því Snerrir kallaðr ok eptir þat Snorri.)

6. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 248, S217.

7. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*. 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000).

8. Jakób Benediktsson, ed. *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 42, S8.

9. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed. *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition*. (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) p. 94.

10. Karl Grönvold, et al., “Ash layers from Iceland in the Greenland GRIP ice core correlated with oceanic and land sediments.” *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 135 (1995): 149–155.

11. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p. 13.

Chapter 1

1. *Oxford Atlas of the World*, 10th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

2. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 34, S3. (Þeir lofuðu mjök landit.)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 36, S4. (Eftir þat var landit kallat Garðarhólmr, ok var þá skógr milli fjalls ok fjörít.)

4. *Ibid.*, p. 35, H3.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 38, H5. (Þá var fjörðrinn fullr af veiðiskap, ok gáðu þeir eigi fyrir veiðum at fá heyjanna, ok dó allt kvikfé þeira um vetrinn.)

6. *Ibid.*, p. 38, H5. (... en Þórólfur kvað drjúpa smjör af hverju strái á landinu, því er þeir höfðu fundit...)

7. Veðurstofa Íslands, “Meðaltal árána 1961–1990,” <http://andvari.vedur.is/vedurfar/yfirlit/med6190.html> (accessed 4 September 2007).

8. Páll Bergþórsson, *The Wineland Millennium: Saga and Evidence*, Anna Yates, trans. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000).

9. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 57.

10. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000) p. 166. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) pp. 88–89.

11. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974) pp. 2–3.

12. personal notes, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands exhibit, Reykjavík, 30 September 2008).

13. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993) p. 36. Beda Venerabilis, *De Temporum Ratione*. *Patrologia Latina* v. 90 (Paris, 1862), http://www.nabkal.de/beda/beda_34.html, accessed 19 September 2007.

14. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) pp. 31–32, S1. (...þeir váru menn kristnir, ok hyggja menn, at þeir hafi verit vestan um haf, því at fundusk eptir þeim bœkr írskar, bjöllur ok baglar ok enn fleiri hlutir, þeir er þat mátti skilja, at þeir váru Vestmenn.)

15. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000) pp. 24–25.

16. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) p. 38.

Chapter 2

1. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) pp. 40–41, S6.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 42, S8. (Þá er Ingólfur sá Ísland, skaut hann fyrir borð öndugissúlum sínum til heilla; hann mælti svá fyrir, at hann skyldi þar byggja, er súlurnar kœmi á land.)

3. Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Angela Hall, trans. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996) p. 186.

4. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 44, S8. (“Lítit lagðisk hér fyrir goðan dreng, er þrælar skyldu at bana verða, ok sé ek svá hverjum verða, ef eigi vill blóta.”)

5. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972) p. 21. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 45, S9. (“Til ills fóru vér um góð heruð, er vér skulum byggja útnes þetta.”)

6. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) p. 94.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–45.

8. Snorri Sturluson, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslensk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941) p. 97, ch. 4. (“Þess strengi ek heit, ok því skýt ek til guðs, þess er mik sköp ok öllu ræðr, at aldri skal skera hár mitt né kemma, fyrr en ek hefi eignazk allan Nóreg með sköttum ok skyldum ok forráði, en deyja at öðrum kosti.”)

9. Knut Helle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, v. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 186.

10. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934. (New York: Garland, 1993) p. 267.

11. Snorri Sturluson, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslensk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941) p. 98, ch. 6. (... at hann eignaðisk óðöl öll ok lét alla bóendr gjalda sér landskyldir, bæði ríka ok óríka.)

12. Knut Helle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, v. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 188.

13. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993) p. 372.

14. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðar-

son, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) p. 4, ch. 1.

15. Agnar Helgason, et al., “mtDNA and the Islands of the North Atlantic: Estimating the Proportions of Norse and Gaelic Ancestry,” *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 68 (2001) pp. 723–737.

16. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) p. 58.

17. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 248, S217.

18. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934) pp. 27–28, ch. 13.

19. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 32, H2.

20. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943) p. 14, ch4.

21. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) p. xxxiii.

22. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) pp. 122–124, S84; pp. 136–140, S95–98.

23. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934) pp. 4–11, ch. 2–6.

24. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) pp. 3–6, ch. 1–2.

25. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934) p. 5, ch. 2. (Ketill svarar: “Í þá veiðistöð kem ek aldregi á gamals aldri.”)

26. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 71, S30.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 337–339, H294.

28. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) p. 8, ch. 4., and p. xxxiii. (Eptir þat fór Þorólfur eldi un landnám sitt...)

29. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 252, S218. (Helgi ... gerði eld mikinn við hvern vatsós ok helgaði sér svá allt herað.)

30. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 1 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnautgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981) p. 91, ch. 1. (... þá kómu þeir á áris ok hjuggu á vök ok felldu í öxi sína ok kölluðu hana af því Öxará.)

31. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Gránastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995) p. 42.

32. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 9, ch. 3. (Svá hafa ok spakir menn sagt, at á sex tegum vetra yrði Ísland albyggt, svá at eigi væri meirr síðan.)

33. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943) p. xlii.

34. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 180, S138. (Þorbjörn súrr kom út at allbyggðu landi; honum gaf Vésteinn hálfan Haukadal.)

35. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943) p. 15, ch. 4. (Nú keypti Þorbjörn súrr land á inni syðri strönd, á Sæbóli í Haukadal.)

36. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936) p. 22, ch. 9.

(Réttum gengr, en ranga
rinnir sæfarinn, ævi,
fákr, un fold ok ríki
fleinhvessanda þessum:
hefk lönd ok fjöld frænda
flýft, en hitt es nýjast,
kröpp eru kaup, ef hreppik
Kaldbak, en ek læt akra.)

37. Sigurður Nortal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933) pp. 72–78, ch. 28–30.

38. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 5, ch. 1. (En þá varð för manna mikil mjök út hingat yr Norvegi, til þess unz konungrinn Haraldr bannaði, af því at hönúm þótti landauðn nema.)

39. Orri Vésteinsson, “Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory,” *Saga-Book 25* part 1 (1998) p. 8.

40. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006) p. 42.

41. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) pp. 13–14.

42. Kevin P. Smith, “Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective,” *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), p. 334.

43. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 84, S45. (Blund-Ketill var maðr stórauðigr; hann lét ryðja víða í skógum ok byggja.)

44. Orri Vésteinsson. “Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory,” *Saga-Book 25* part 1 (1998), pp. 1–29.

45. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) pp. 10–13.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Chapter 3

1. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 63.

2. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), pp. 63–64.

3. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 311, 313, 315, H268.

4. Siân Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók — The Book of the Icelanders Kristni saga — The Story of the Conversion*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, vol. XVIII. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006), p. 19, endnote 28. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 38–39.

5. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 8–9, ch. 3.

6. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 97.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 85. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), pp. 154–155, K90.

8. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 17, ch. 7. (Pat mon verða satt, es vér slítum í sundr lögin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn.)

9. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 172, ch. 70. (... því at með lögum skal land vart byggja, en með ólögum eyða.)

10. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 171.

11. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 10.

12. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 151, K89.

13. Sigurður Nortal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001) p. 38, ch. 14. (...riðr Þórðr þá í mót honum og vill eigi, at hann nái þinghelginni. Oddr riðr með þrjú hundruð manna. Þeir Þórðr verja þingit ok slær þá þegar í bardaga...)

14. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 99.

15. Jón Jóhannesson. *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 48.

16. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 99.

17. Phillip Pulsiano, ed. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 10.
18. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*. Haraldr Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 64–65. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 190, K117.
19. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 189, K117.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 53, K20.
22. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldr Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 50.
23. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 182–183.
24. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 315, H268. (...at ek vinn eið at baugi, lögeið; hjálpi mér svá Freyr ok Njörðr ok himm almáttki áss...)
25. *Ibid.*, p. 396, S399. (En þat gekk óviða í ættir, því at synir þeira sumra reistu hof ok blótudu, en land var alheiðit nær hundraði vetra.)
26. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 261.
27. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), pp. 85–86.
28. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 363–415, ch. 138–145.
29. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993) pp. 234–235.
30. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, eds., *The Viking World* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 27.
31. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), pp. 65–66, K31.
32. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 123–124.
33. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954) p. 94, ch. 36; p. 99, ch. 37; p. 105, ch. 40; p. 110, ch. 43.
34. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 183–184.
35. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 98, K55.
36. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 262, ch. 82, footnote 1, and pp. lxvii–lxviii.
37. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 98, K55.
38. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 231–232.
39. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 98.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
41. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 182. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), pp. 59–60, K25.
42. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 99.
43. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 54, K20.
44. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 10.
45. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, eds., *The Viking World* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 26.
46. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 99.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 109, ch. 3. (Suðr ór Fljótsdal r sjautján dagleiðir á Þingvöllum.)
49. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*. Haraldr Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 43.
50. Sigurður Nortal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 97.
51. Pétur Gunnarsson, *Encounters* (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 2009), p. 56.
52. Veðurstofa Íslands, “Mánaðar- og árgildi,” <http://andvari.vedur.is/vedurfar/yfirlit/ManArs-gildi.html> (accessed 16 February 2009).
53. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 112–113, ch. 4. (Þit munuð sjá, hvar standa innar um þvera búðina tvau húðföt, ok reis ek upp ór öðru, en í öðru hvilir Þorgeirr, bróðir minn.)
54. *Ibid.*, p. 113, ch. 4. (En nú hefir hann sofnat síðan ok hefir réttan fótinn út undan fötunum fram á fótafjölinu sakar ofhrita, er á er fœtinum.)
55. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 301, ch. 119. (Hásæti var í miðri búðinni, ok sat þar Guðmundr í.)
56. *Ibid.*, p. 298, ch. 119. (Skapti sat á pallinum ok fagnaði Ásgrími; hann tók því vel.)
57. *Ibid.*, p. 298 footnote 3.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 304, ch. 120. (Þeiringu inn í

búðina ok í innanverða. Þorkell sat á miðjum palli ok menn hans alla vega út í frá.)

59. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 100.

Chapter 4

1. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 9, ch. 3. (Svá hafa ok spakir menn sagt, at á sex tegum vetra yrði Ísland albyggt, svá at eigi væri meirr síðan.)

2. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 55.

3. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 42.

4. Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 280–287.

5. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 52.

6. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage*, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 64.

7. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 139.

8. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 230–231.

9. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 345.

10. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 155, K221.

11. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 348.

12. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 140.

13. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 40, K131.

14. Ibid., p. 219, K254.

15. Ibid., p. 40, K131.

16. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 350.

17. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds. *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6

(Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 65, ch. 20. (En þar var mjök jafnfært en vit ok hugrekki, því at havárki var neitt til.)

18. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986) p. 141, S100.

19. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grænlandinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 260–261, ch. 6.

20. Ibid., p. 269, ch. 8.

21. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 258.

22. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 52.

23. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 142, S103.

24. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 269.

25. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 174, K112.

26. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 23, ch. 12. (Þá mælti Höskuldr: “Hversu dýr skal sjá kona, ef ek vil kaupa?” Gilli svara: “Þú skalt reiða fyrir hana þrjár merkr silfrs.” “Svá virði ek,” segir Höskuldr, “sem þú munir þessa ambátt gera heldr dýrlagða, því at þetta er þriggja verð.”)

27. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 132, ch. 10. (...hann unði lítt við sinn hlut.)

28. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Vápnfirðinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 38–39, ch. 7.

29. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 117.

30. Ibid., pp. 113–114.

31. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), pp. 69–70, K155.

32. Keneva Kunz, trans., *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* from Viðar Hreinsson, ed. *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), v. 5, p. 77, ch. 48. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 150, ch. 48. (“Gott skaplyndi hefði þér fengit, ef þér værið dötr einshvers bónda ok láta hvárki at yðr verða gagn né mein; en slíka svirviðing ok skömm, sem Kjartan hefir yðr gört, þá sofi þér eigi at minna, at hann riði hér hjá garði við annan mann, ok hafa slíkir menn mikit svínsminni; þykki mér ok rekin ván, at þér þorið Kjartan heim at sækja, ef þér þorið eigi at finna hann nú, er hann ferr við annan mann eða þriðja, en þér sitði heima ok látið vænlíga ok eruð æ höltzi margir.”)

33. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 228, ch. 78. (Þá mælti Guðrún: “Þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest.”)

34. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 33, ch. 9. (“Sá er annarr, at þú tak við mér ok lát sem ekki sé í orðit. Ella mun ek nefna mér vátta nú þegar ok segja skilit við þik, ok mun ek láta föður minn heimta mund minn ok heimanfylgju, ok mun sá kostr, at þú hafir aldri hvíluþröng af mér síðan.”)

35. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 264, ch. 82.

36. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 206–209, ch. 4.

37. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 329, ch. 129. (“En þó vil ek lofa útgöngu konum ok börnum ok húskör-lum.”)

38. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Droplaugarsona saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 162, ch. 10. (“Þat er heimskligt at berja til kvenna, ok er [án] illis gengis, nema heiman hafi.”)

39. Andrew Dennis et al., tran. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 219, K254.

40. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 116–117, ch. 37.

41. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 27–28, ch. 13. (“Ek var þaðan hertekin fimmtán vetra gömul.”)

42. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 116.

43. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 75, ch. 29.

44. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 256, ch. 13. (Er þat ok alþýðu manna sögn, at Helgi hafi öngva konu elskat, svó at menn viti.)

enn úti var dauðr fyr durum.

Haltr riðr hrossi, hiorð recr handarvanr, daufr vegr oc dugir:

blidr er betri, enn brendr sé:
nytr mangi nás.)

2. Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 28.

3. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 143.

4. Ibid., p. 145.

5. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 37, st. 127.

6. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 150.

7. Snorri Sturluson, “Gylfaginning” in *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, Anthony Faulkes, ed., (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 18, ch. 15.

8. *Hamðismál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 273–274, st. 30.

9. Þorleifur Hauksson, ed., *Sverris saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 30 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2007), pp. 72–73, ch. 47. (Svá sagði einn búandi er hann fylgði syni sínum til herskipa ok réð honum ráð, bað hann vera hraustan ok harðan í mannaunum, ‘ok lifa orð lengst eftir hvern,’ sagði hann. ‘Eða hvernig myndir þú hætta ef þú kæmir í orrostu, ok vissir þú þat áðr at þar skyldir þú falla?’ Hann svarar: ‘Hvat væri þá við at sparask at högga á tver hendr?’ Karl mælti: ‘Nú kynni nokkurr maðr þat at segja þér með sannleik at þú skyldir eigi þar falla?’ Hann svarar: ‘Hvat væri þá at hlífask við at ganga fram sem bezt?’ Karl mælti: ‘Í hverri orrostu sem þú ert staddr þá mun vera annathvart at þú munt falla eða braut komask, ok ver þú fyrir því djarfr, því at allt er áðr skapat. Ekki komr ófeigum í hel ok ekki má feigum forða. Í flotta er fall verst.’)

10. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 57.

11. Anthony Faulkes, “The Viking Mind or in Pursuit of the Viking,” *Saga-Book* 31 (2007), p. 52.

12. Ibid., p. 65.

13. Ibid., p. 69.

14. *Hávamál* from Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 17–29, st. 1–79.

15. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 101, ch. 32. (Þá mælti Eyjólfur: “Hafið hendr á hundinum ok drepí, þó at blauðr sé.” Hávarðr tekr þá til orða: “Þó er för vár helztí ill, þó at vér

Chapter 5

1. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 28, st. 70–71.

(Betra er lifðom oc sællifðom,

ey getr qvircr kú

eld sá ec up brenna auðgom manni fyrir

vinnim eigi þetta niðingsverk, ok standi menn up ok láti hann eigi þessu ná.”)

16. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 197, K238.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 354, St376.

18. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 314, ch. 123. (“... því at margir vitu eigi, er hann sjá, hvárt er karlmaðr eða kona” ... “Því þá — ef þú ert brúðr Svinfell-sáss, sem sagt er, hverja ina níundu nótt ok geri hann þik at konu.”)

19. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 10, ch. 2. (“ok skal annarr standa aptar en annarr, ok skál nið þat standa ávallt, þeim til háðungar.”)

20. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 171, ch. 57. (“Hér set ek upp niðstöng, ok sný ek þessu niði á hönd Eiriki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu,” — hann sneri hrosshöfðinu inn á land, — “sný ek þessu niði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byg-gva, svá at all fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirik konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi.”)

21. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 197, St361.

22. Björn Sigfússon, ed., *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1940), p. 228, ch. 25.

23. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Kormáks saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1939), p. 236, ch. 10. (“... þú ert maðr ungr ok lítt reyndr, en á hólmgöngu er vandhöefi, en alls ekki á einvígi.”)

24. *Ibid.*, p. 237, ch. 10.

25. *Ibid.* (...sá er um bjó, skyldi ganga at tjös-nunum, svá at sæi himin milli fóta sér ok heldi í eyrasnepla með þeim formála, sem síðan er eptir hafðr í blóti því, at kallat er tjösnuhlót.)

26. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Svarfðæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1956), p. 146, ch. 9. (Jarl bauð að halda skildi fyrir Þorstein, en hann sagði, at engi maðr skyldi sik í hættu hafa fyrir hann; — “mun ek sjálfr bera skjöld minn.”)

27. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 210, ch. 65.

28. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), p. 95, ch. 11.

29. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 141, K86.

30. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundar-sonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 84, ch. 24. (... hefir

hann nú drepit þrjá bræðr, hvern á fœtr öðrum; váru þeir svá hraustir menn í sér, at engi þeira vildi í sjóð bera annan.)

31. Theodore M. Andersson *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 18–19.

32. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 125–130, ch. 9.

33. Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 6–30.

34. Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 40.

35. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 207.

36. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 59.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

38. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 207.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

40. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 116, ch. 37.

41. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðar-son, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 66, ch. 26.

42. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 53–54, ch. 16.

43. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 280–281, ch. 111.

44. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðar-son, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 117, ch. 43.

45. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 23, st. 38.

(Vápnom sínóm scala maðr velli á

feti ganga framarr;

þvíat övist er at vita, nær verðr á vegom úti geirs um þörf guma.)

46. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 280, ch. 111. (...hann tók kornkippu ok sverð í aðra hönd ok ferr till gerðis sins ok sár niðr korninu.)

47. William R. Short, *Viking Weapons and Combat Techniques* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2009).

48. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), p. 201, ch. 32. (Þá þreif Björn sporð skjaldarins

hinni hendinni ok rak í höfuð Þórði, svá at hann fekk þegar bana...)

49. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 158, ch. 63. (“Hlaupu vér at honum fram allir senn; hann hefir engan skjöld, ok munu vér hafa ráð hans í hendi.”)

50. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. *Grænlandinga þáttir*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 287, ch. 6. (Síðan hljóp Þórðr, fóstbróðir Einaris, at Kolbeini ok vildi höggva hann, en Kolbeinn snaraðisk við honum ok stakk fram øxarhyrnunni, ok kom í barkann Þórði, ok hafði hann þegar bana.)

51. *Völuspá* from Ursula Dronke, ed., *The Poetic Edda* v. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 13, st. 24.

52. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 138, ch. 54. (Auðólfur þreif upp spjót ok skaut at Gunnari; hann tók á lopti spjótit ok skaut aptr þegar, ok fló í gengum skjöldinn ok Austmanninn ok niðr í völinn.)

53. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 138, ch. 53. (Síðan lagði hann spjótinu fyrir brjóst jarlinum, í gengum brynjuna ok búkinn, svá at út gekk um herðarnar, ok hóf hann upp á kesjunni yfir höfuð sér ok skaut niðr spjótsalanum í jörðina, en jarlinn sæfðisk á spjótinu, ok sá þat allir, bæði hans menn ok svá hans óvörnir.)

54. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 186–188, ch. 77.

55. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 57–61, ch. 17.

56. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Fóstbræðra saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 128, ch. 3. (Í þann tíð var á Íslandi, sverð ótið mönnum til vápnabúningis.)

57. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 25, ch. 13. (Konungr dró gullhring af hendi sér, þann er vá mörk, of gaf Hóskuldi, ok sverð gaf hann honum annan grip, þat er til kom hálf mörk gulls.)

58. *Ibid.*, p. 153, ch. 49. (Kjartan hjó stórt, en sverðit dugði illa; brá hann því jafnan undir fót sér.)

59. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Þorskrifðinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 203, ch. 13. (Þá brá Þorbjörn sverði ok hjó til Þóris ok kom í hjálminn en sverðit brotnaði undir hjöltunum.)

60. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 49, ch. 17. (“Eigi hefir þú mér hlýðinn verit; veit ek ok eigi, hvat þú munir þat með váp-

num vinna, er þarft er; mun ek ok þau eigi til láta.”)

61. R. I. Page, “A Most Vile People”: *Early English Historians on the Vikings* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1987).

62. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), pp. 4–6, ch. 2. (Það var eitt sinn að Ketill mælti við Þorstein son sinn: “Önnur gerist nú atferð ungra manna en þá er ek var ungr þá girntusk menn á nökkur framaverk, an-nattvegga að ráðask í hernað eða afla fjár ok sóma með einhverjum atferðum þeim er nökkur mannhætta var í, en nú vilja ungir menn gerask heimaelskir ok sitja við bakela ok kýla vömb sína á miði ok mungati ok þverr því karlmennska ok harðfengi, en ek hefi því fjár aflat ok virðingar að ek þörða at leggja mig í hætta ok hörð ein-vigi. ... Nú ætla ek at þér sé ókunn hermanna lög, ok mætti ek þau kenna þér; ertu nú ok svá aldrs kominn, at þér væri mál að reyna [þik ok vita], hvað hamingjan vill unna þér.”)

63. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 117, ch. 46. (En er þeir kómu í skóginn, þá nam Egill stað ok mælti: “Þessi ferð er allill ok eigi hermannelig; vér höfum stólit fé bónda, svá at hann veit eigi til; skal oss al-dregi þá skömm henda; förum nú aptr til bæ-jarins ok látum þá vita, hvat títt er.”)

64. *Ibid.*, p. 114, ch. 46.

65. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 75–82, ch. 29–31.

66. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 418, ch. 9.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 410, ch. 7.

68. John Franks, “From Saint’s Life to Saga: The Fatal Walk of Alfred Ætheling, Saint Amphibalus and the Viking Bróðir.” *Saga-Book* 25 pt.2, (1999), pp. 121–137.

69. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 65, ch. 26.

70. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 205, ch. 85.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208, ch. 86.

72. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 81, ch. 23.

73. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), pp. 24–25, ch. 9. (...þá var með honum Rögnvaldr af Mœri ok margir aðrir stórir höfðingjar ok þeir berserkir, er Úlfæðnar váru kallaðir; þeir höfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur ok vörðu framstafn á konungs skipinu,...)

74. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and*

Europe 800–1200 (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), pp. 103–104, 390–391.

75. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 268, ch. 103.

76. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), p. 73, ch. 7. (...en berserkrinn stóð hlífarlauss fyrir ok hugði, at hann hefði it sama vápn ok hann sýndi; en Gunnlaugr hjó hann þegar banahögg.)

77. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 70, ch. 27.

78. Snorri Sturluson. *Ynglinga saga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1941), p. 17, ch. 6.

79. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 38.

80. Snorri Sturluson. *Ynglinga saga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1941), p. 17, ch. 6.

81. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 267–268, ch. 103.

82. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 202–206, ch. 64.

83. Ibid., p. 202, ch. 64. (Ok er gekk fram á völlin at hölmstaðnum, þá kom á hann berserksgangr, tók hann þá at grenja illiliga ok beit í skjöld sinn.)

84. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 60–64, ch. 25.

85. Ibid., pp. 70–71, ch. 28.

86. Ibid., pp. 71–75, ch. 28.

87. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1956), p. 19, ch. 6.

88. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 180, ch. 60.

89. Ibid., pp. 192–193, ch. 64.

Chapter 6

1. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 79.

2. Björn Sigfússon, ed., *Ljósvetninga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1940), p. 65, ch. 12. (“Svá er sem þú veizt,” segir hon, “at ek hefi haft umönnun hér ok verksnað, en nú fellr mér þat allt þyngra, því at vöxtr minn er í þrútnan ok þyngisk heldr gangan. Ek hefi eigi þurft annarra hér til, en nú þykki

mér þess ráðs þurfa, er svá berr til; ek em nú kona eigi heil.”)

3. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 74.

4. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 51–52, ch. 17. (“Þykkir þér betra,” sögðu þeir, “at klappa um kviðinn á konu Bárðar stýrimanns en at gera skyldu þína á skipi, ok er slíkt óþolanda.”)

5. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 79.

6. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), pp. 243, St. 58.

7. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 53, ch. 16. (Þorgrímr mælti: “Viltu at ek snúumk at þér?”)

8. Ibid., p. 54, ch. 16.

9. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 516.

10. Ibid., p. 516.

11. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 80, ch. 31. (Skalla-Grímr ok þau Bera áttu börn mjög mörg, ok var þat fyrst, at öll önduðusk...)

12. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 142.

13. *Hávamál in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 43, st. 158.

14. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 83.

15. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 79, K161.

16. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 24–27, ch. 12–13.

17. Ibid., pp. 71–72, ch. 26.

18. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 71, ch. 25.

19. Ibid., pp. 88–89, ch. 34.

20. Ibid., p. 251, ch. 98. (Hróðný mælti: “Statt þú upp ór þinginum frá elju minni ok gakk út með mér ok svá hon ok synir þínir.”)

21. Ibid., pp. 251–252, ch. 98.

22. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), pp. 20–22, ch. 8.

23. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Soci-*

- ety (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 81.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
25. “Viðbætur: ævi Snorra goða” from Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 185–186.
26. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), p. 17, ch. 7. (...en of barnaútburð skyldu standa en fornu lög ok of hrossakjöt-sát.)
27. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1945), p. 74, ch. 58.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 77, ch. 60.
29. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 88–89.
30. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), pp. 231, 310. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1956), pp. 40–41, ch. 12.
31. “Bolla þáttur” from Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 231, ch. 79.
32. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Viglundar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1959), pp. 67–68, ch. 4.
33. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Flóamanna saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), p. 250, ch. 10.
34. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 81–82, ch. 31.
35. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 90–91, ch. 28.
36. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 100, ch. 40.
37. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1956), pp. 276–278, ch. 12.
38. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 42, ch. 14.
39. “Bolla þáttur” from Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 230–232, ch. 79.
40. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Viglundar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1959), p. 75, ch. 7. (Þar fóru eptir aðrar þeira listir, enda sparði Þorgrímr ekki af at kenna sonum sínum.)
41. *Ibid.* (Öngvar hannyrðir vildi Þorbjörg at Fossi kenna dóttur sinni. Þat þótti Hólmkeli bónda mikill skaði...)
42. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 62, ch. 25.
43. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936.) pp. 36–42, ch. 14.
44. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 143.
45. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), pp. 59–60, ch. 4. (Þorsteinn bað hann þar vera þeim stundum, sem hann vildi, ok þar var hann þau missari ok nam lögspeki at Þorsteini, ok virðisk öllum mönnum þar vel til hans.)
46. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 116.
47. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 75, ch. 27. (“... ok er sá kallaðr æ minni maðr, er öðrum fósttar barn.”)
48. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 116.
49. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 75, ch. 27.
50. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Viglundar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1959), pp. 75–76, ch. 7.
51. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 180.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
53. Kristján Eldjárn. *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed., (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 221–223, 584.
54. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 126, K78.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 53, K20.
56. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 97, K172.
57. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1939), p. 109, ch. 41.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 122, ch. 45.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6, ch. 2. (“Nú ætla ek at þér sé okunn hermanna lög, ok mætti ek þau kenna þér; ertu nú ok svá aldrs kominn, at þér væri mál að reyna [þik ok vita], hvað hamingjan vill unna þér.”)
60. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 89, ch. 35.

61. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 22, ch. 13.
62. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), p. 101, ch. 3.
63. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Bandamanna saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 295–297, ch. 1.
64. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 65, ch. 25.
65. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 22–24, ch. 6.
66. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 198, K238.
67. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 112.
68. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Kormáks saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1939), p. 221, ch. 5. (Þorkell sér heiman, at þeim stækisk seint, ok tekr vápn sín. Í því bili kom Steingerðr út ok sér ætlan föður síns; tekr hon hann höndum, ok kemsk hann ekki til liðs með þeim bræðrum.)
69. *Ibid.*, p. 221, ch. 5.
70. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 409.
71. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 113.
72. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 27.
73. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 409.
74. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 137, ch. 45. (Hrefna veitti ok eigi afsövr fyrir sína hönd, ok bað hon faður sinn ráða.)
75. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 31, ch. 10. (“...at þú mundir eigi unna mér svá mikit sem þú sagðir jafnan, er þér þótti eigi þess vert, at við mik væri um talat þetta mál...”)
76. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 63, ch. 23. (Þorgerðr svarar: “Þat hefi ek þik heyr t mæla, at þú ynnir mér mest barna þinna; en nú þykki mér þú þat ósanna, ef þú vill gipta mik ambáttarsyni, þótt hann sé vænn ok mikill áburðarmaðr.”)
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65, ch. 23.
78. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), pp. 243, St. 58.
79. Kirsten Wolf, *Daily Life of the Vikings*. (Westport: Greenwood, 2004), p. 9.
80. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 93, ch. 34.
81. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 409.
82. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 114.
83. Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 59–60. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 65, K150.
84. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 278, St. 166.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 244, St59.
86. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 409.
87. Knut Halle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, v. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 239.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*
91. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), p. 105, ch. 37. (Hrútr var þá áttroedr, er hann drap Eldgrím, ok þótti hann mikit hava vaxit af þessu verki.)
92. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 7, K118.
93. *Hávamál* from Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 33, st. 134. *Hávamál* in *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed., (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 39, st. 134.
- (opt er gott, þat er gamlir qveða;
opt ór scörpom belg scilín orð koma.)
94. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ed., *Flóamanna saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), p. 323, ch. 34. (Helgi kvað öngva ván í, at hann hrykki eigi við, — “ok mun lítill frami í at bera af fretkarli þínum.”)
95. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 320, ch. 124. (... en þá

var hon gömul mjök, ok kölluðu Njálssynir hana gamalœra, er hon mælti mart, en þó gekk þatt mart eptir.)

96. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 295, ch. 85. (“Statt þú upp,” segir hon, “ok gakk til rúms þíns ok lát oss vinna verk vár.”)

97. Ibid., pp. 297–298, ch. 85.

98. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 406.

99. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 609.

100. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 130, ch. 8. (Snýr Sámr þá aprt við svá búit, kemr þar til, er Eyvindr lá, tekr til ok verpr haug kemr eptir hann ok féлага hans.)

101. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 58.

102. Ibid., p. 64.

103. Ibid., p. 46.

104. Ibid., pp. 48, 66.

105. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 609.

106. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 63.

107. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 609.

108. Ibid., p. 592.

109. Ibid., p. 609.

110. Ibid., p. 593.

111. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 56, ch. 17. (Þetta þiggja þeir ok fara allir saman á Sæból til haugsgörðar ok leggja þörgrim í skip. Nú verpa þeir hauginn eptir fornum sið.)

112. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 117.

113. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 595.

114. Ibid., p. 550.

115. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 175, ch. 58. (Lét Egill þar gera haug á framanverðu nesinu; var þar í lagðr Skalla-Grimr ok hestr hans ok vápn hans ok smíðartól...)

116. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heið-*

num sið á Íslandi, 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed., (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 609.

117. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 407.

118. Snorri Sturluson, “Gylfaginning” in *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, Anthony Faulkes, ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), pp. 32–34, ch. 38–41.

119. Ibid., p. 27, ch. 34.

120. Rudolf Simek. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. Angela Hall, trans. (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1993.) p. 232.

121. Ibid., p. 138.

122. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 192–194, ch. 78.

123. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 19, ch. 11. (... hann sá, at fjallit lausk upp norðan; hann sá inn í fjallit elda stóra ok heyrði þan-gat mikinn glaum ok hornaskvöl; ok er hann hlýddi, ef hann næmi nökkur orðaskil, heyrði hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini Þorskabít ok förunautum hans ok mælt, at hann skal sitja í öndvegi gegnt feðr sínum.)

124. Ibid., pp. 91–92, ch. 33.

125. Ibid., pp. 93–94, ch. 34.

126. Ibid., pp. 94–95, ch. 34.

127. Ibid., pp. 169–170, ch. 63. (... var hann þá enn ófúinn ok inn trollsligsti at sjá; hann var blár sem hel ok digr sem naut...)

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid., pp. 170–176, ch. 63.

130. Kirsten Wolf, *Daily Life of the Vikings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), p. 162.

131. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 610.

132. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 298–299, ch. 86.

133. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 610.

Chapter 7

1. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 288.

2. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 248.

3. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 85 and 290.

4. Gavin Lucas and Thomas McGovern, "Bloody Slaughter: Ritual Decapitation and Display at the Viking Settlement of Hofstaðir, Iceland," *European Journal of Archaeology* 10(1) (2008), pp. 7–30.
5. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age*, (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 60.
6. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 168, ch. 55.
7. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 102–103, ch. 3.
8. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 85, 290.
9. Gavin Lucas and Thomas McGovern, "Bloody Slaughter: Ritual Decapitation and Display at the Viking Settlement of Hofstaðir, Iceland," *European Journal of Archaeology* 10(1) (2008), pp. 7–30.
10. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 85, 290.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 290–291.
12. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), pp. 184–185, 192.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 183.
14. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 17, ch. 7.
15. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974) pp. 85, 291–292.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 292.
17. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 185–186, ch. 75.
18. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*. 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 609.
19. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 182.
20. Diane Canwell, *Vital Guide: Vikings* (Ramsbury, UK: Airlife, 2003), p. 19.
21. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 85, 289.
22. W. Paul Adderley, et al., "Local-Scale Adaptations: A Modeled Assessment of Soil, Landscape, Microclimate and Management Factors in Norse Home-Field Productivities," *Geoarchaeology* 23, no. 4 (2008), pp. 500–527.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 277, ch. 19.
25. Personal notes, Skógasafn exhibition, Skógar, 30 September 2008.
26. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 95, ch. 28.
27. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 352, 602.
28. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 295.
29. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*. 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed., (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 406–407.
30. Personal notes, Skógasafn exhibition, Skógar, 30 September 2008.
31. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 276–277, ch. 19.
32. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 61.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
34. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 110, K181.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 111, K181.
36. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 85, 293.
37. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 59.
38. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), pp. 117–118, K191.
39. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 295.
40. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat.* v. 2 (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 345–346.
41. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 308.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, pp. 296–297.
43. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 280, ch. 111. (... hann tók kornkippu ok sverð í aðra hönd ok ferr til gerðis sins ok sár niðr korninu.)
44. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 45–46.
45. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 107

46. Personal notes, Þjóðminjasafn exhibition, Reykjavík, 30 September 2008.
47. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 59.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 85, 297.
50. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 75–79, ch. 29–30. (Stóð þá á mörgum fótum fjárfli Skalla-Gríms.)
51. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Vápnfirðinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 38–41, ch. 7.
52. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed. *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 126, K78.
53. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 134, ch. 53. (Gunnarr hafði farit einn samt heiman af bœ sínum ok hafði kornkippu í annarri hendi, en í annarri handðxi. Hann gengr á sædland sitt ok sár þar niðr korninu ok lagði guðvefjarskikkju sína niðr hjá sér ok oxina ok sár kornunu um hríð.)
54. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 29, ch. 9. (Þorkell var ofláti mikill ok vann ekki fyrir búi þeira...)
55. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 126, K78.
56. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 245–247, ch. 12.
57. Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson, *The Reconstructed Medieval Farm in Þjórsárdalur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), p. 13.
58. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), pp. 75–95.
59. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 53, ch. 16.
60. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 250.
61. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 137–138. Kirsten Wolf. *Daily Life of the Vikings*. (Westport: Greenwood, 2004), p. 108. Andrew Dennis, et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 186, K234.
62. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934. (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 134.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 459.
64. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 303.
65. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 186, S145. (Hon setti ok Kviarmið á Ísafjarðardjúpi ok tók til á kollótta af hverjum bónda í Ísafirði.)
66. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 52.
67. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 97.
68. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland*, (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 49.
69. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 168.
70. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 51.
71. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 305.
72. Andrew Dennis, et al. trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 114, K186.
73. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Föstbræðra saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 189, ch. 13. (... Þorgeirr ok Þormóðr fóru norðr á Strandir ok allt norðr til Horns. Ok einn dag fóru þeir í bjarg at seekja sér hvannir, ok í einni tó, er síðan er kölluð Þorgeirstó, skáru þeir milkar hvannir...)
74. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 134.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
76. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 164.
77. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 57.
78. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 135.
79. Rudolf Grewe and Constance B. Hieatt, ed., *Libellus de arte coquinaria: An Early Northern Cookery Book* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001).
80. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), pp. 82–83.
81. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 51.
82. Personal notes, Reykjavík 871 exhibition, Reykjavík, 28 February 2008.

83. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 51.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
85. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 244.
86. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 407, ch. 145. (... þreif hann þá til hans ok brá honum á lopt ok rak hann at höfði i soðketilinn. Dó Sölvi þegar.)
87. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Kormáks saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 216, ch. 4. (Um haustit annaðisk Narfi um slátrastarf. ... Narfi stóð við ketil, ok er lokit var at sjóða, vá Narfi upp mörbjúga ok brá fyrir nasar Kormáki...)
88. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), pp. 163–164.
89. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 134.
90. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 71.
91. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 78.
92. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), pp. 145–184.
93. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 98.
94. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), pp. 186–187. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 70.
95. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 297.
96. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi* 2nd ed., Adolf Fríðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 352–353, 602.
97. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 139.
98. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 258.
99. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 135.
100. Sigurður Nortal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 108–109, ch. 44; pp. 120–121, ch. 48; p. 226, ch. 71.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 81, ch. 31.
102. *Hávamál* from Carolyne Larrington, trans. *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 16, st. 19. Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 20.
(Haldit maðr á kerri, drecci þó at hófi mioð,
mæli þarft eða begi;
ókynnis þess vār þic engi maðr,
at þú gangir snemmi at sofa.)
103. William R. Short, “Food, Diet, and Nutrition in the Norse Era,” Hurstwic, http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/food_and_diet.htm#details (accessed 26 September 2007).
104. Hildur Gestsdóttir, “The Palaeopathological Diagnosis of Nutritional Disease: a Study of the Skeletal Material from Skeljastadir, Iceland,” M.Sc. dissertation, University of Bradford (1998).
105. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 121–122, ch. 47. (Njáll mælti: “Hér er hey ok matr, er ek vil gefa þér. Vil ek, at þú leitir aldri annarra en mín, ef þú þarft nökkurs við.”)
106. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 35, st. 116.
107. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 45–46, ch. 16. (Pat var þa hátt, at menn vistuðu sik sjálfir til þings, ok reiddu flestir mali um söðla sína.)
108. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 135.
109. Kevin P. Smith, “Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective,” *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), p. 328.
110. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edition, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 41.
111. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámsýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 120.
112. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 292.
113. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámsýningin The Settlement Exhibition*

tion (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 118.

114. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), pp. 110–111.

115. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 186, ch. 77. (Skáli Gunnars var görr af viði einum ok súðþakiðr utan ok gluggar hjá brúnásunum ok snúin þar fyrir speld.)

116. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Islendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 308.

117. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 34.

118. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 51, ch. 15. (... ok var strát gólf á Sæbóli af sefinu af Seftjörnn.)

119. Ibid., p. 53, ch. 16. (Síðan tekr hann sefit af gólfinu ok vefr saman, kastar síðan í ljósit eitt, ok slokknar þat.)

120. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 120.

121. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edition, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 43.

122. Guðmundur Ólafsson, *Eiríksstaðir í Haukadal: Fornleifarannsókn á skálarúst* (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 1998), pp. 25, 30.

123. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 123.

124. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 186, ch. 77. (Skáli Gunnars var görr af viði einum ok súðþakiðr utan ok gluggar hjá brúnásunum ok snúin þar fyrir speld. Gunnar svaf í lopti einu í skálanum ok Hallgerðr ok móðir hans.)

125. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edition, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 43.

126. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 53, ch. 16. (Nú ferr hann at öllu tómliga. Eptir þat stendr hann ok hlýðisk um, hvárt nókkurir vekði, ok verðr hann þess varr, at allir menn sofa. Þrjú váru log í skálanum.)

127. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 96, ch. 28. (Auðunn tók af hestum ok bar inn skyr í fangi sér; honum var myrkt fyrir augum. Grettir rétti fótinn fram af stokkinum, ok fell Auðunn áfram, ok varð

undir honum skyrkyllirinn ok gekk af yfirbandit. Auðunn spratt upp ok spurði, hvat skelmi þar væri.)

128. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat. v. 2* (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), p. 320.

129. Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson, *The Reconstructed Medieval Farm in Þjórsárdalur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), p. 13.

130. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 55, ch. 17. (... en Þorkell, bróðir Gísla, gengr upp fyrir í hvílugólft ok sér, hvar at skór Gísla liggja, frosnir ok snæugir allir; hann skaraði þá upp undir fótborðit ok svá, at eigi skyldi sjá þá aðrir menn.)

131. Ibid., pp. 86–87, ch. 27. (... ok tekr nú fötin öll ör rúminu ok mælti, at Gíslí skyldi þar niðr leggjask í hálminn, ok berr á hann ofan fötin, ok hvilir nú á honum ofan hon Álfðis, ...)

132. Ibid., pp. 87–88, ch. 27. (Ok er Álfðis heyrði hark þeira, þá spyrr hon, hvat gaurangangi þar væri eða hverir glóþarnir starfaði á mönnum um nætr.)

133. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935) p. 138, ch. 50. (... breiddi hon yfir rekkjuna enskar blájur ok silkikult; hon tók ok ör örkinni rekkjurfél ok allan ársalinn með ...)

134. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 186, ch. 77. (Gunnar svaf í lopti einu í skálanum ok Hallgerðr ok móðir hans.)

135. Bryndís Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 123.

136. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia*. (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 159.

137. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 347.

138. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat. v. 2* (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), p. 323.

139. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edition, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 44.

140. Ibid., p. 43.

141. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 290, ch. 116. (Flosi gekk inn í stofuna ok settisk niðr ok kastaði í pallinn háætínu undan sér...)

142. Ibid., p. 290, footnote 3.

143. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edi-

tion, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 41–42.

144. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 271–272, ch. 78.

145. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 42, ch. 12.

146. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 79, ch. 29.

147. Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* in *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, v. 1, Anthony Faulkes, ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), pp. 86–87, st. 316.

148. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 136.

149. Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson, *The Reconstructed Medieval Farm in Þjórsárdalur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), p. 20.

150. Gavin Lucas, et al., ed. *Archaeological Field Manual, 3rd edition* (Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2003), pp. 33–35.

151. Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson, *The Reconstructed Medieval Farm in Þjórsárdalur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), pp. 6–7.

152. Sigríður Sigurðardóttir, *Torf til bygginga*, Smárit Bygðasafns Skagfirðinga, v. VII (Varmahlíð: Bygðasafn Skagfirðinga, 2007), pp. 8–19.

153. Páll Pálsson, personal communication, 14 July 2005.

154. Guðmundur Ólafsson, *Eiríksstaðir í Haukadal: Fornleifarannsókn á skálarúst* (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 1998), p. 30.

155. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 79.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

157. *Ibid.*

158. Guðmundur Ólafsson, *Eiríksstaðir í Haukadal: Fornleifarannsókn á skálarúst* (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 1998), pp. 18–19, 30.

159. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 118, ch. 44. (... ok gekk ut verkmanna dyrr ok inn aðrar dyrr ok tók ęxi sína, er stóð hjá durum. Ok er Glœðir gekk út, gekk Þorkell eptir honum ok hjó til hans í höfuðit, ok hafði Glœðir þegar bana. Þorkell hljóp til norðrura, því at þeir váru fyrir suðrdurum.)

160. Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, second edition, Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams, trans. (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 44.

161. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of*

Early Medieval Scandinavia. (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 154, 156.

162. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 51, ch. 20. (Katla sat á palli ok spann garn...)

163. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Víglandar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 97, ch. 18. (Pat segja menn, at Ketilríðr væri mkök harmþrungin um vetrinn; svaf hon opt lítit ok vakti í saumstofu sinni um nætr.)

164. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 112, ch. 44.

165. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), p. 175.

166. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 145, ch. 47. (Í þann tíma var þat mikil tizka, at úti var salerni ok eigi allskammt frá bænum, ok svá var at Laugum.)

167. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 66, ch. 26. (Í þann tíma váru útikamrar á bæjum. En er þeir Snorri gengu frá eldinum, ætluðu þeir til kamarsins, ok gekk Snorri fyrstr, ok bar undan út í dyrrnar, aðr tilræðit Svarts varð...)

168. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 301, S284. (Þá dró Tjörvi líkneski þeira á kamarsvegg, ok hvert kveld, er þeir Hróarr gengu til kamars, þá hrækði hann í andlit líkneski Þóris, en kyssti hennar líkneski...)

169. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 147–150, ch. 53–54.

170. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 85.

171. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1985), pp. 404–405, ch. 2.

172. Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson, *The Reconstructed Medieval Farm in Þjórsárdalur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), p. 11.

173. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 168.

174. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), p. 175.

175. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the*

Ecological Heritage (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), pp. 78–79.

176. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 37.

177. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), p. 175.

178. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 239, ch. 75. (“Svá vil ek heil, systir, hér er kominn Grettir Ásmundarson, ok þykki mér raunar skammrifamikill vera, ok liggir berr. En þat þykki mér fádæmi, hversu lítt hann er vaxinn niðri, ok ferr þetta eigi eptir gildleika hans öðrum.”)

179. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240, ch. 75.

180. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 116.

181. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117.

182. James E. Montgomery, “Ibn Fadlan and the Rusiyyah,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000), p. 5, <http://www.uib.no/jais/v003/montgol.pdf>, accessed 10 October 2007.

183. G. Stroud and R. L. Kemp, *Cemeteries of St. Andrew, Fishergate*, v. 12, fasc.2 (York, UK: Council for British Archaeology, 1993), pp. 232–241.

184. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 183.

185. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 57, ch. 20. (Hann var vel auðigr at fé ok vænn at áliti, en sá hlutr var á ráði hans, at honum óx eigi skegg.)

186. *Ibid.*, p. 113, ch. 44. (“Þat mun ek til finna, sem satt er,” segir Hallgerðr, “er hann ók eigi í skegg sér, at hann væri sem aðrir karlmenn, ok köllum hann nú karl inn skegglaus, en sonu hans taðskegglinga...”)

187. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117, ch. 45.

188. *Ibid.*, p. 85, ch. 33. (... hárit tók ofan á bringu henni ok var bæði mikitt ok fagrt.)

189. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 219, K254.

190. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Víglundar saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 98, ch. 18. (Vígundur bað hana skera hár sitt ok þvá höfuð sitt; hon gerði ok svá. En er þat var gert, mælti Víglundur: “Þat læt ek um mælt, at engin skeri hár mitt né þvá höfuð mitt önnur en þú, meðan þú lifir.”)

191. Sigurður Nortal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Heiðarvíga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 273, ch. 21.

192. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed.,

Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), pp. 229–230, St. 361.

193. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 240.

194. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

195. *The Lay of Regin in The Poetic Edda*, Carolyne Larrington, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 156, st. 25. *Reginismál in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed., (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 179, st. 25.

(Kemðr ok þveginn skal kænna hverr

ok at morni mettr;

þvíat ósýnt er, hvar at apni kœmr;

íllt er fyr heill at hrapa.)

196. *Sayings of the High One in The Poetic Edda*, Carolyne Larrington, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 22, st. 61. *Hávamál in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 26, st. 61.

(Þveginn oc mettr riði maðr þingi at,

þótt hann sæð væddr til vel;

scúa oc bróka scammiz engi maðr,

né hestz in heldr, þótt hann hafit góðan.)

197. Adolf Friðriksson et al., ed., *Fornleifastofnun Íslands Ársskýrsla 2005* (Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2005), pp. 40–41.

198. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 112, ch. 39. (Kjartan fór opt til Sælingsdalslaugar; jafnan bar svá til, at Guðrún var at laugu...)

199. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 239, ch. 75. (Hann gekk til bæjar at Reykjum ok fór í laug, því at honum var kalt orðit nókkut svá, ok bakaðisk hann langi í lauginni um nóttina ok fór síðan í stofu.)

200. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 72–73, ch. 28. (... lét Styr gera baðstofu heima undir Hrauni, ok var grafin í jörð niðr, ok var gluggr yfir ofninum, svá at útan mátti á gefa, ok var þat hús ákafliga heitt.)

201. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 110, ch. 4. (Peir ganga út ok ofan at Óxará, fyrir neðan brúna.)

202. Sigurður Nortal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Bjarnar saga Hittælakappa*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 133, ch. 9. (... ok honum var gör kerlaug, því at eigi er annarra lauga kostr í Nórge.)

203. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Svarfdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1956), p. 131, ch. 2.

204. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Þórðar saga hreðu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 199, ch. 7. (Eptir þat bjó hon honum kerlaug ok fægði sár hans...)

205. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 117, ch. 44. (Um morgininn gekk Þorkell í útibúr ok hvatti ǫxina Jarlsnaut ok gekk síðan í anddyri; þá var Glœðir þar ok tók laugar.)

206. R.I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 98.

207. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 116.

208. Hildur Gestsdóttir, “The Palaeopathological Diagnosis of Nutritional Disease: A Study of the Skeletal Material from Skeljastadir, Iceland,” M.Sc. dissertation, University of Bradford (1998).

209. Jan Risberg, et al., “Environmental Changes and Human Impact as Recorded in a Sediment Sequence Offshore from a Viking Age town, Birka, Southeastern Sweden,” *The Holocene* 12 (2002), p. 453.

210. *Sayings of the High One in The Poetic Edda*, Carolyne Larrington, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 34, st. 137. *Hávamál in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 39–40, st. 137.

(Ráðoms þér,	enn þú ráð nemir,
Loddfáfnit,	
nióta mundo, efpú namr,	
þér muno góð, ef þú getr:	
hvars þú ǫl dreccir,	kíos þú þér iarðar
	megin!
þvíat iorð tecr við	enn eldr við sóttom,
öldri,	
eic við abbindi,	ax við fiolkyngi,
höll við hýrogi	— heiptom scal mána
	qveðia—
beiti við bitsóttom,	enn við bölvi rúnar;
fold scal við flóði taca.)	

211. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 229–230, ch. 72.

212. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 230, St. 364.

213. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gumlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 86, ch. 10. (Þá var vafiðr fótrinn ok í liðinn færðr ok þrútnaði allmjök.)

214. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 98, ch. 40. (Lét hann þá brjóta í annat sinn of sagði sjálfir fyrir, hvé binda skyldi. Festi þá vel, ok gekk hann líl haltr.)

215. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, ed., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 130, ch. 45. (... en Þóroddr vildi eigi annat en aptr væri rifit sárit ok sett höfuðit réttara.)

216. G. Stroud and R. L. Kemp, *Cemeteries of St. Andrew, Fishergate*, v. 2, fasc.2. (York, UK: Council for British Archaeology, 1993.) pp. 225–232.

217. Ólafur Halldórsson, *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1995), pp. 417–420, ch. 6.

218. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Þórðar saga hreðu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 197, ch. 7. (“Þess þykki mér ván, ef læknar koma til.”)

219. Ibid. (... “en því er ek hér kominn, at ek vilda, at þú græddir Indriða, þvá at aldri fær vaskara mann.”)

220. Ibid., p. 199, ch. 7.

221. Snorri Sturluson, *Magnúss saga ins góða* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed. Íslensk fornrit v. 28, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1945), p. 45, ch. 28. (Þá gekk konungr til þeirra manna, er honum sýndisk, ok þreifaði um hendr þeim, er en hann tók í lófana ok strauk um, þá nefndi hann til tólf menn, þá er honum sýndisk sem mjúkhenztir mundu vera, ok segir, at þeir skyldu binda sár manna, en engi þeira hafði fyrr sár bundit.)

222. Kirsten Wolf, *Daily Life of the Vikings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), p. 66.

223. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 116.

224. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 294, ch. 85. (... en í elli hans gerðisk hann þungfœrr, ok glapnaði honum bæði heyrn ok sýn; hann gerðisk ok fótstirðr.)

225. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslensk fornrit v. 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2002), p. 393, ch. 234. (“Vel hefir konunginn alit oss. Feitt er mér enn um hjartarœtr.”)

226. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 129, ch. 45. (“Þat hygg ek,” sagði Snorri, “at þetta sé feigs manns blóð, ok munu vér eigi eptir fara.”)

227. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Heiðarviga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 303, ch. 30. (“Eigi er þat trollskaþr, at maðr þoli sár ok sé eigi svá blautr, at eigi verisk hann, meðan hann má...”)

228. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1956), p. 78, ch. 23. (En er hon kom at, þá fell Þórarinn fyrir Mávi, ok var ǫxlin höggvin

írá, svá at lungun fellu út í sárit. En Halldóra batt um sár hans ok sat yfir honum, til þess er lokit var bardaganum.)

229. G. Stroud and R. L. Kemp, *Cemeteries of St Andrew, Fishergate*. v. 12, fasc.2 (York, UK: Council for British Archaeology, 1993), pp. 232–241.

Chapter 8

1. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), pp. 12–13.

2. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Islendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 308.

3. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat.* v. 2 (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 183–184, 336.

4. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 63.

5. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heidnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd edition (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 399–400, 606.

6. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 316.

7. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat.* v. 2 (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 187–189.

8. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), p. 157.

9. Ibid., pp. 157–158.

10. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 225, ch. 77. (... at hann vildi engi klæði bera nema skarlatksklæði ok pellsklæði ... þá gæðu konur engis annars en horfa á Bolla ok skart hans ok þeira félaga.)

11. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 231, ch. 92., (Skarpheðinn var fremstr ok var í blám stakki ok hafði torguskjöld ok oxí sína reidda um öxl.)

12. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 99.

13. Ibid.

14. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), pp. 137–138.

15. Personal notes, Þjóðminjasafn exhibition, Reykjavík, 29 February 2008.

16. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 53–54, ch. 17, and p. 53 footnote 2. (Stýrimannskona sú in unga var því jafnan vön, at sauma at höndum Gretti, ok höfðu skipverjar þat mjök í fleymingi við hann.)

17. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Þorsfirðinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 197, ch. 9.

18. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 129–130, ch. 45. (“Eigi er þat logit ar yðr Þorbrandssonum, er þér eruð sundrgörðamenn miklir, at þér hafið klæði svá þröng, at eigi verðr af yðr komit.”)

19. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 262, ch. 16. (Eigi höfðu menn þá linbrækr í þat mund.)

20. Ibid., p. 271, ch. 18. (Hann rís upp í skyrtu ok linbrækr. Hann kippir skóm á fætr sér, en kneppir eigi. Ekki hafði hann yfir sér ok eikki í hendi.)

21. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing*, (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), p. 103.

22. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 274, ch. 19.

23. Ibid., p. 253, ch. 13. (Húskarlar gengu at vökunum ok lögðust at niðr ok drukku, er þeim var heitt orðit við gönguna, lögðu vöpnin niðr á fótin, þau er þeir höfðu un daginn. Þeir voru í stakki ok brókum.)

24. John Porter, trans., *The Saga of the People of Fljótsdal* from Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), v. 4, p. 409, ch. 16. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 261, ch. 16. (Hann var í grám kyrtli. Hann hafði kneppt upp blöðunum á axlir, en lykkjurnar hengu niðr at hliðinum, ok í hvítum torfstakki yfir utan.)

25. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006) p. 49. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 66.

26. *Rígsþula* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 280, st. 2.

27. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 109, ch. 34. (Nú fara þau öll, ok eru þær í kyrtlum, ok draga kyrtlarnir döggslóðina.)

28. Keneva Kunz, trans. *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* from Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), v. 5, p. 87, ch. 55. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934) p. 168, ch. 55. (Guðrún var í námkyrtli, ok við vefjarupphlutr þröngr, en sveigr mikill á höfði. Hon hafði knýtt um sik blæju, ok váru í mórk blá ok tróf fyrir enda.)

29. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*,

- Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 243, ch. 11. (Þeir voru svö búnir hversdagliga, at þeir voru í söluvaðmál-skufum mórendum, þar brækr at neðan. Feldi höfðu þeir til yfirhafnar.)
30. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), p. 145.
31. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), p. 242.
32. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 207, K246.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 349, St. 261.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 207, K246.
35. Kevin P. Smith, “Ore, Fire, Hammer, Sickle: Iron Production in Viking Age and Early Medieval Iceland,” *De re metallica: The Uses of Metal in the Middle Ages*, AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art, v. 4, Robert Bork, et al., ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp. 183–206.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 78, ch. 30. (Skalla-Grimr var járnsmíðr mikill ok hafði rauðablástr mikinn á vetrinn; hann lét gera smíðju með sjónum mjök langt út frá Borg, þar sem heitir Raufarnes; þótti honum skógar þar fjarlægir.)
38. Ian G. Peirce, *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), p. 7.
39. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-Eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), p. 172.
40. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 106.
41. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 37–38, ch. 11.
42. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd edition (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 407–408.
43. Agnes Stefánsdóttir and Kristinn Magnússon, *Fornleifakönnun í grunnri Reykholtskirkju í Borgarfirði* (unpublished report, Reykjavík, 2005). Personal notes, Reykholt exhibition, 9 June 2009.
44. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 300.
45. Kevin P. Smith, “Ore, Fire, Hammer, Sickle: Iron Production in Viking Age and Early Medieval Iceland,” *De re metallica: The Uses of Metal in the Middle Ages*, AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art, v. 4, Robert Bork, et al., ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp. 183–206.
46. Kevin P. Smith, “Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective,” *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), p. 335.
47. Greta Arwidsson and Gösta Berg, *The Mästermyr Find: A Viking Age Tool Chest from Gotland* (Lompoc: Larson, 1999.)
48. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 58, S20, and footnote 3. (... hann byggði fyrst í Botni; þar var þá svá stórr skógr, at hann gerði þar af hafskip.)
49. Kevin P. Smith, “Landnám: the settlement of Iceland in archaeological and historical perspective,” *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), p. 336.
50. Bjarni F. Einarsson, *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 37.
51. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 67, ch. 24. (Þat var á einu hausti, at í því sama holti lét Óláfr boe reisa ok af þeim viðum, er þar váru högginnir í skóginum, en sumt hafði hann af rekaströndum.)
52. *Ibid.*, p. 79, ch. 29. (Þat sumar lét Óláfr gera eldhús í Hjarðarholti, meira ok betra en menn heiði fyrr sét.)
53. Michèle Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears: An Archaeology of Jewellery, Gender and Identity in Viking Age Iceland*. BAR International Series 1276. (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2004), pp. 112–113.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Bryndis Sverrisdóttir, ed., *Reykjavík 871±2: Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition* (Reykjavík: Minjasafn Reykjavíkur, 2006), p. 107.
57. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), pp. 93–95. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 194.
58. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 253.
59. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, “Ship Types and Sizes AD 800–1400,” *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200, Proceedings of the Nordic Seminar on Maritime Aspects of Archaeology, Roskilde, 13th–15th March, 1989*, Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, ed. (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 1991), pp. 75–76.
60. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 139, ch. 42. (Ríðu þeir Haukadalskarð vestr ok svá sem liggj út á Nes, keyptu þar skreið mikla ok báru á sjau hestum; sneru heimleiddis, er þeir váru albúnir.)
61. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*. Haraldur

Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 327.

62. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 95, ch. 38.

63. Ibid., p. 90, ch. 36.

64. Ibid., p. 128, ch. 50.

65. Ibid., p. 96, ch. 38.

66. Ibid., p. 140, ch. 54.

67. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 263.

68. Ibid., pp. 263–264.

69. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 310–315.

70. Ibid., p. 326.

71. Ibid., p. 327.

72. Ibid., p. 319.

73. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Haensla-Póris saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 8, ch. 2. (... hann var vanr í fyrra lagi í kaupstefnur at koma ok leggja lag á varning manna, því at hann hafði heraðsþjórn; þótti engum dælt fyrr at kaupa en vissi, hvat hann vildi at gera.)

74. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 47, ch. 17. (Ingimundr var vanr fyrstr manna til skips at koma ok taka af varningi slíkt er homun sýndisk, ok enn gerði hann svá...)

75. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 323.

76. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 105, ch. 39. (Í bagga hans váru þrjú hundruð vað mála ok tólf varafeldir ok farnest hans.)

77. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 323.

78. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 51–52, ch. 17. (“Eigi þykki mér samkeypi yðvart kaupmanna gott; þú gerir þeim ólög, en niðir þá á svá gört ofan, en þeir heitask at steypa þér fyrir borð, nú er slíkt ótultækiligt.”)

79. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 104, ch. 39. (Þat var þá kaupmanna siðr, at hafa eigi matsveina, en sjálfir mótunautar hlutuð með sér, hverir búðarvörð skyldi halda dag frá degi; þá skyldu ok allir skiparar eiga drykk saman, ok skyldi ker standa við siglu, er drykkur var í, ok lok yfir kerinu, en sumr drykkur var í verplum, ok var þaðan boett í kerit, svá sem ór var drukkit.)

80. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A His-*

tory of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 323.

81. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), pp. 226, 251.

82. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 27, ch. 7.

83. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 97, ch. 39. (... var þá víða höfð uppsát kaupskipum í ár eða í læekjarósa eða í sik.)

84. Ibid., p. 243, ch. 78. (Pat var eitt sumar, at skip var í Hvítá, ok var þar mikil kaustefna...)

85. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 323.

86. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), pp. 110–113.

87. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 331, p. 333. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 2000), pp. 389–390.

88. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 101.

89. Morkinskinna: *The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, Theodore M. Anderson and Kari Ellen Gade, tran., *Islandica* 51, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 191, ch. 30.

90. Andrew Dennis et al., tran., and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000.) pp. 207–210, K246; p. 349, St. 261.

Chapter 9

1. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat*, in 3 volumes (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1917, 1920, 1928).

2. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882).

3. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*. Ships & Boats of the North, v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002).

4. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships & Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003).

5. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen,

eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), p. 276.

6. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), p. 56.

7. Snorri Sturluson *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 336, ch. 88. (Á Orminum langa várir fjögur rúm ok þrír tigrir.)

8. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), p. 12.

9. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 197, S156. (Hann fór til Íslands ok kom í Bjarnarfjörð með alskjölduðu skipi; síðan var hann Skjalda-Björn kallaðr.)

10. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, Katherine John, trans. (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1951), pp. 133–134.

11. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), p. 59.

12. Snorri Sturluson, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 333, ch. 85. (Óláfr konungr gekk eftir árum útbyrðis, er menn hans roru á Orminum...)

13. Eldar Heide, “Viking—‘Rower Shifting’? An Etymological Contribution,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 120 (2005), pp. 41–54, accessed 16 September 2008, <http://www.uib.no/people/hnoeh/Publikasjonar%20til%20heimesida/viking%20ro wshift.pdf>

14. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 238, ch. 74. (Þat var vika sjávar, sem skemmst var til lands ór eyjunni.)

15. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), pp. 42–44.

16. Séan McGrail, *Ancient Boats in North-West Europe: The Archaeology of Water Transport to AD 1500* (London: Addison Wesley Longman 1987), p. 268.

17. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), p. 52; plate VI, fig. 17.

18. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), p. 227.

19. Ibid., pp. 136–137.

20. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 32, S2. (Svá segja vitrir menn, at ór Nóregi frá Staði sé sjau dœgra sigling til Horns á Íslandi austanverðu...)

21. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 14, ch. 4. (Síðan fara þeir til skips ok láta haf ok

eru úti aukit hundrað dœgra ok koma at hafi vestr í Dýrafjörð á syðri strönd, í ós þann, er Haukadalsóss heitir.)

22. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), pp. 224–225.

23. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, “Ship Types and Sizes AD 800–1400” in Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, ed., *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200* (Roskilde: Vikingskipshallen, 1991), p. 75.

24. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 111, ch. 4. (Síðan settu þeir upp skip sitt í vik einni. Þar á lóninu höfðu þeir gengit á borð at álfraka, ok þann sama vallenga rak upp í þessarri vik, ok því heitir þat Dritvík.)

25. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 14, ch. 4.

26. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*. Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 144.

27. Ibid., pp. 144–145.

28. Ibid., p. 145.

29. Ibid., p. 191.

30. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 104, ch. 39. (Þat var þá kaupmanna siðr, at hafa eigi matsveina, en sjálfir mötunautar hlutuðu með sér, hverir búðarvörð skyldi halda dag frá degi; þá skyldu ok allir skippar eiga drykk saman, ok skyldi ker standa við siglu, er drykk var í, ok lok yfir kerinu, en sumr drykk var í verplum, ok var þaðan boett í kerit, svá sem ór var drukkit.)

31. R.I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 36, 94–96.

32. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 58, H20. (... þar var þá svá stórr skógr, at hann gerði þar af hafskip.)

33. Kevin P. Smith, “Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective,” *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), p. 336.

34. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 273.

35. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 187.

36. Ibid.

37. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), p. 54.

38. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), p. 11.

39. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen,

eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), pp. 234–235.

40. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), pp. 185–186.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

42. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 55, ch. 17. (Þa var ekki dæluaustr á hafskipum; kölluðu menn þat byttuaustr eða stampaustr. Hann var bæði vassamr ok erfiðr; skyldi þar hafa byttur tvær; fór þá önnur niðr, er önnur fór upp.)

43. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 230. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), pp. 143–144.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

45. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, “Ship Types and Sizes AD 800–1400” in Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, ed., *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200* (Roskilde: Vikingskibshallen, 1991), p. 75.

46. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), p. 276.

47. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 181–182.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 172.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

56. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), pp. 60–61.

57. Snorri Sturluson, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), pp. 335–336, ch. 88. (Þat hefir skip verit bezt gört ok með mestum kostnaði í Nórgei.)

58. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), pp. 237–238.

59. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Króka-Refs saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2007), p. 129, ch. 5. (Austmanns

son hafði sér at leiku skip þat, er verit hafði í Nórgei sem líkast haffæröndum byrðingum; en áðr Austmanns son færi á brutt, gaf hann Ref skip þetta, ok þat hafði Refr haft til skemmtanar sér í eldaskálanum at smíða þar eptir.)

60. Snorri Sturluson, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 335, ch. 88.

61. Niels Neersø, *A Viking Ship: Roar Ege — A Reconstruction of a Trading Vessel from the Viking Age* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Breakwater, 1986), p. 36.

62. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Olaf Olsen, eds., *The Skuldelev Ships I*, Ships and Boats of the North v. 4.1 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2002), p. 61.

63. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1985), p. 433, ch. 13.

64. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 63, ch. 19. (Þeir tóku upp skip sitt ok báru af sjá. Eptir þat hljópu þeir at naustinu; þar stóð inni karfinn Þorfinns, sá inn stóri. Hann settu aldri færi menn á sjá en þrír tigr, en þeir tólf rykkuðu honum þegar fram á fjörugrjóti. Síðan tóku þeir upp sitt skip ok báru inn í naust.)

65. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 182.

66. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 313, H268. (... at menn skyldi eigi hafa höfuðskip í haf, en ef þeir hefði, þá skyldi þeir af taka höfuð, áðr þeir kæmi í landsýn, ok sigla eigi at landi með gapandi höfðum eða ginandi trjónum, svá at landvættir fælist við.)

67. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 188.

68. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 213, ch. 67. (Egill hafði látit gera langskips segl mjök vandat; segl þat gaf hann Arinbirni ok enn fleiri gjafar, þær er sendiligar váru...)

69. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 191.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

71. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), pl.II.

72. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), p. 13.

73. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 190.

74. Ibid.
75. R.I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 47. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson. *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 200. James W. Bright. *An Anglo-Saxon Reader, Edited, With Notes, A Complete Glossary, A Chapter on Versification and An Outline of Anglo-Saxon Grammar*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912.) p. 39, http://lexicon.ffi.cuni.cz/tiff/oe_bright/b0039.tiff referenced 19 February 2009.
76. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 413, ch. 161. (En þeir váru þretán dægr á skipsflakinu ok höfðu enga vist nema einn smjörlauf ok átu þar við svarðreiðann.)
77. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Ships and Boats of the North, v. 2 (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), p. 188.
78. Ibid., p. 190.
79. Sibylla Haasum, *Vikingatidens Segling och Navigation*, Theory and Papers in North European Archaeology 4 (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Books, 1974) p. 114.
80. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), p. 13.
81. Sibylla Haasum, *Vikingatidens Segling och Navigation*, Theory and Papers in North European Archaeology 4 (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Books, 1974), p. 113.
82. Ian Atkinson, *The Viking Ships*, (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1980), p. 23.
83. Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga saga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1941), p. 77, ch. 46.
84. Séan McGrail, *Ancient Boats in North-West Europe: The Archaeology of Water Transport to AD 1500* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1987), pp. 254–255.
85. Sibylla Haasum, *Vikingatidens Segling och Navigation*, Theory and Papers in North European Archaeology 4 (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Books, 1974), p. 117.
86. Páll Bergþórsson, *The Wineland Millenium: Saga and Evidence*, Anna Yates, trans. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 145–146.
87. Séan McGrail, *Ancient Boats in North-West Europe: The Archaeology of Water Transport to AD 1500* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1987), pp. 263–264.
88. Sibylla Haasum, *Vikingatidens Segling och Navigation*, Theory and Papers in North European Archaeology 4 (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Books, 1974), p. 116.
89. Ibid., p. 117.
90. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 429.
91. Ibid., pp. 429–430.
92. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), p. 33, H2. (Af Hernum af Noregi skal sigla jafnan í vestr til Hvarfs á Grœnlandi, ok er þá siglt fyrir norðan Hjaltland, svá at því eins sé þat, at allgóð sé sjóvar sýn, en fyrir sunnan Færeyjar, svá at sjór er í miðjum hlíðum, en svá fyrir sunnan Íslands, at þeir hafa af fugl ok hval.)
93. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934, (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 429.
94. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 274.
95. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 429.
96. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 274.
97. Søren Thirslund, *Viking Navigation* (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum/National Museum of Denmark, 2007).
98. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 429.
99. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grœnlendinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 251, ch. 2. (Meira var þar jafndægri en á Grœnlandi eða Íslandi; sól hafði þar eyktar stað ok dagmála stað um skammdegi.)
100. Páll Bergþórsson, *The Wineland Millenium: Saga and Evidence*, Anna Yates, trans. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 161–165.
101. William R. Short, unpublished computer simulation, 2006.
102. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 429.
103. Páll Bergþórsson, *The Wineland Millenium: Saga and Evidence*, Anna Yates, trans. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 156.
104. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. *Grœnlendinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 246, ch. 1. (Eptir þat sá þeir sól ok máttu þá deila ættir.)
105. Ibid., p. 257, ch. 5. (Pau velkði úti allt sumarit, ok vissu eigi, hvar þau fóru.)
106. Richard Cleasby, et al., ed. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 55, s.v. “bátr.”
107. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Sch-*

leswig, (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), pp. 106–107.

108. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 40, ch. 12. (“...en nú falla vötn öll til Dýrafjarðar, ok mun ek þangat riða, enda em ek þess fúss.”)

109. Ibid., pp. 39–41, ch. 11–12.

110. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, Katherine John, trans. (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1951), pp. 60–61.

111. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 46–47.

112. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 275–282.

113. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 56, ch. 17. (Þetta þiggja þeir ok fara allir saman á Sæból til haugsgörðar ok leggja Þorgím í skip. Nú verpa þeir hauginn eptir fornum sið.)

114. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*. 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 279.

115. Christian Hirté, “Logboats” in Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig* (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2003), pp. 148–168.

116. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, Katherine John, trans. (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1951), p. 65.

117. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1934), pp. 40–41, ch. 18.

118. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 243, ch. 78. (...föru húskarlar ok höfðu skip áttætt, er Egill átti. Þat var þá eitt sinn, at Bðvarr beiddisk at fara með þeim, ok þeir veittu honum þat; fór hann þá inn á Völlu með húskörlum; þeir váru sex saman á áttæru skipi.)

119. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 29, ch. 12. (...ok er þetta spurði Þorgím ok þeir bræðr, bjuggusk þeir sem hvatast ok váru tólf á teinæringi...)

120. Ibid., p. 26, ch. 11. (Þorgeirr var fyrir búi þeira bræðra í Reykjarfirði ok reri jafnan til fiska, því at þá váru firðirnir fullir af fiskum.)

121. Ibid., pp. 26–27, ch. 11. (Þenna mann sendi Flosi til höfuðs Þorgeiri; hann leyndisk í naustinu.)

122. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), p. 277, ch. 19. (Þar var velt fyrir framan skip, er Sveinungr átti, er hann sótti sér farm á suðr í fjörðu un haustit. Vóru grafnir

stafnarnir niðr í jörð, en nú fokinn undir snjóir hit neðra með borðunum.)

123. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), p. 232, S196.

124. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), p. 245–247, ch. 12.

125. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 115.

126. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat v. 2* (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 33–55, 311–315.

127. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1956), p. 80, ch. 23. (Þat var henni veitt, ok lét hon hefja hann í vagn ok búa hógliga um.)

128. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat v. 2* (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 3–33, 307–309.

129. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 47.

130. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 655.

131. Ibid.

132. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 46.

133. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 223, ch. 71. (Síðan skiljast þeir; fara þeir Egill upp á hálsinn, en frá konungsmönnum er þat at segja, at þegar er sýn fal í milli þeira Egils, þá tóku þeir skið sín, er þeir höfðu haft, ok stigu þar á; létu síðan ganga aprt á leið, sem þeir máttu...)

134. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 233.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid., p. 51.

137. Ibid., p. 233.

138. Personal communication, Þórdís Guðmundsdóttir, 20 July 2004).

139. Personal notes, Skógasafn exhibit, Skógar, 23 September 2008.

140. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 655. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 257.

141. Personal communication, Magnús Magnússon, 8 July 2005.

142. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga v. 2*

(Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 404–405, ch. 157.

143. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 308, 598.

144. *Ibid.*, pp. 312–316, 598–599.

145. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), pp. 272–273.

146. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 318–319, 599.

147. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 273.

148. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 656.

149. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed., (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 322, 599.

150. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 656. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000.) pp. 319, 600.

151. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 259.

152. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 320, 599.

153. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat*, v. 2. (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), pp. 246–248, 352.

154. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 318, 599.

155. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 262, ch. 16. (Þá riðu menn mjök í standsöðlum smeltum.)

156. A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Schetelig, *Osbergfundet: utgit av den Norske Stat*, v. 2 (Oslo: Universitets Oldsaksamling, 1928), p. 352.

157. *Ibid.*

158. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 23, ch. 13.

159. Richard Cleasby, et al., ed., *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 76, s.v. “braut.”

160. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldrur

Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 335.

161. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 72–75, ch. 28.

162. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), pp. 108–109, ch. 3.

163. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 342, ch. 131. (Ríðu þeir þá í braut ok fyrir norðan jökul ok svá austr til Svínafells.)

164. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 109, ch. 3. (Hann ferr norðr til brúa ok svá yfir brú ok þaðan yfir Möðrudalsheiði, ok váru í Möðrudal um nótt.)

165. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Heiðarvíga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 297, ch. 28.

166. Örlýgur Hálfðanarson, ed., *The Visitor's Key to Iceland* (Reykjavík: Stöng, 2003), pp. 527–528.

167. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldrur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 336.

168. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 12, footnote 1.

169. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 112, K184.

170. *Ibid.*, p. 302, AM 315 fol. D.

171. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), p. 74. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, ed. *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), p. 48.

172. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldrur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 335.

173. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Bandamanna saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), p. 296, ch. 1. (Nú groeðir hann brátt fé, þar til er hann á einn ferjuna, ok heldr nú svá milli Miðfjarðar ok Stranda nokkur sumur; tekr hann nú at hafa vel fé.)

174. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Þórðar saga hreðu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2007), p. 194, ch. 7. (Þorvaldr bauð honum Einar, son sinn, til fylgdar, því at Þórði váru leiðir ókunnigar...)

175. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 104, ch. 40. (“Þá muntu vilja fylgja mér á götu ok vísa mér til annars bæjar...”)

176. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 151, K89.

177. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 43–45, S8.

178. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 13, ch. 8. (Hon lét setja skála sinn á þjóðbraut þvera, ok skyldu allir menn riða þar í gengum; þar stóð jafnan borð ok matr á, gefinn hverjum er hafa vildi...)

179. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 39, st. 135–136.

180. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 272, ch. 78. (Einarr beið hans þrjár nætr, en þat var engi siðr, at sitja lengr en þrjár nætr at kynni.)

181. *Hávamál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 22, st. 35.

182. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 224–228, ch. 71–72.

183. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 141–145, ch. 51.

184. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 44.

185. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 10–11, ch. 4.

186. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 57, K23.

187. Jón Jóhannesson, ed. *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), p. 243, ch. 11. (Þá var Helgi Droplaugarson tólf vetra gamall... Grímr var tíu vetra ok allvel menntur.)

188. Richard Cleasby, et al., ed. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 603, s.v. “sumar.”

189. Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* in *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, v. 1. Anthony Faulkes, ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 99, ch. 63.

190. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 10–11, ch. 4.

191. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 125, K78.

192. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandi-*

navia: An Encyclopedia, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 66.

193. Thorsteinn Vilhjálmsson, “Time and Travel in Old Norse Society,” *Disputatio* 2 (1997), 89–114.

Chapter 10

1. Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language*, Rory McTurk, trans. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2004), p. 9.

2. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 179.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 179–181.

4. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), p. 70, ch. 7. (Ein var þá tunga á Englandi sem í Nórgei ok í Danmörku. En þá skiptusk tungur í Englandi, er Vilhjálmr bastarðr vann England...)

5. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), p. 244, St. 61.

6. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 377.

7. Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language*, Rory McTurk, trans. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2004), pp. 64–65.

8. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 359.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, Theodore M. Anderson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans., *Islandica* 51 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 206, ch. 34.

11. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 210.

12. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1945), p. 358, ch. 206. (“Skuluð þér,” segir hann, “hér vera ok sjá þau tíðendi, er hér gerask. Er yðr þá eigi segiandi saga til, því at þér skuluð frá segia ok yrkja um siðan.”)

13. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 43.

14. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 96–97.

15. *Fáfnismál* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten*

Denkmälern (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 184, st. 20.

(Ræð ec þér nú, Sigurðr, enn þú ráð nemir,
oc rið heim heðan!

it gialla gull, oc it glóðrauða fé,
þér verða þeir baugar at bana.)

16. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 96.

17. *Skírnismál* from Ursula Dronke, ed., *The Poetic Edda* v. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 395–396.

18. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 84–85.

19. Anthony Faulkes, “The Viking Mind or in Pursuit of the Viking,” *Saga-Book* 31 (2007), p. 52.

20. Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, Lee M. Hollander, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 4. Snorri Sturluson, *Prologus from Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1941), p. 5. (Með Haraldri konungi váru skáld, ok kunna menn enn kvæði þeira ok allra konunga kvæði, þeira er síðan hafa verit í Nóregi, ok tókum vér þar mest dœmi af, þat er sagt er í þeim kvæðum, er kveðin váru fyrir sjálfum höfðingjunum eða sonum þeira. Tökum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrustur.)

21. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 479–480.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 480–481.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 484–485.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 486–487.

26. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 144, ch. 55.

27. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 59, ch. 18. (Þórdís nam þegar vísuna, gengr heim ok hefir ráðit vísuna.)

28. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 276, ch. 87. (“Mikil ágæti eru slíkt,” sögðu þeir, er skildu vísuna.)

29. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 246–256, ch. 78.

30. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 480.

31. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 128.

32. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 2001), pp. 189–190, ch. 29.

33. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 146.

34. Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language*, Rory McTurk, trans. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2004), p. 39.

35. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 66.

36. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 237.

37. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 44.

38. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 40. Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.) p. 36.

39. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 62.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

41. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 136.

42. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 100, ch. 40. (Þá hljóp Egill at Grími ok rak oxina í höfuð honum, svá at þegar stóð í heila.)

43. *Ibid.* (...en Bera kvað Egil vera víkingsefni...)

44. *Ibid.*, p. lxx.

45. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 100.

46. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 249–264, ch. 79–82.

47. Carol Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 61–91.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–73. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 83–98, ch. 24–28.

49. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Íslenzk fornrit* v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 104–106, ch. 33.

50. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders* Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), pp. 86–87.

51. Bjarni F. Einarsson *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach: Granastaðir and the*

Ecological Heritage (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995), p. 19.

52. Gísli Sigurðsson *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, Nicholas Jones, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 31.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

54. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 247.

55. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 338, 341.

56. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 42, ch. 12. (Hann tók þar ór refil sextogan at lengð...)

57. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud, UK: Tempus, 2006), p. 151.

58. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), p. 43.

59. Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing* (Stroud, UK: Tempus, 2006), p. 151.

60. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 79, ch. 29.

61. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 271.

62. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 298.

63. Michèle Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears: An Archaeology of Jewellery, Gender and Identity in Viking Age Iceland* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2004), pp. 112–113.

64. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 100, 357.

65. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), p. 272–273.

66. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000) pp. 233, 440.

67. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 278.

68. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 96, 444.

69. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and*

Europe 800–1200 (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 274.

70. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 144–145, 444.

71. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 336.

72. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 450–451.

73. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), pp. 56, 346.

74. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 383. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed., Adolf Friðriksson, ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 461.

75. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 246.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

78. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 108, ch. 58.

79. Morkinskinna: *The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*. Theodore M. Anderson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans., *Islandica* vol. 51 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 149, ch. 13, st. 61.

80. *Völuspá* in *Poetic Edda*, v. 2, Ursula Dronke, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 18, st. 41.

81. *Atlaqviða in Grænlencza* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 245, st. 31.

82. *Atlamál in Grænlencza* in Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 257, st. 66.

83. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 344.

84. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Viglundar saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 66, ch. 4. (...en jarl leiddi konung heim með allri hirið sinni til hallar með allra handa hljóðferum, með söngum ok strengleikum ok alls konar skemmtan, er til kunni at fá...)

85. *Ibid.*, p. 67, ch. 4.

86. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Jökuls þáttir Búasonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1959), p. 58, ch. 3.
87. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), p. 123, ch. 7. (Hon sló hörpu nær allar nætr, því at henni varð þá enn sem optar ekki mjök svefnsamt.)
88. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1954), p. 114, ch. 44.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 136, ch. 54.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 317, ch. 124.
91. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), pp. 111–112, ch. 4.
92. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1985), pp. 412–413, ch. 4.
93. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 274–275, ch. 86–87.
94. Julia H. McGrew, trans., *Sturlunga saga*, v. 1 (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 471, ch. 39, endnote 1.
95. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnautgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 87, ch. 39. (Ok hér með færðu Breiðbælingar Loft í flimtan ok gerðu um hann dansa marga ok margs konar spott annat.)
96. Snorri Sturluson, *Magnússona saga from Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1945), p. 259, ch. 21.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 259–260, ch. 21. (Ek kunna ok á íslægjum, svá at engan vissa ek þann, er þat keppði við mik, en þú kuninn þat eigi heldr en naut.)
98. N. Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Oslo: Kristiana, 1882), p. 46, plate VIII, fig. 1.
99. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 143.
100. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 169.
101. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), p. 65.
102. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*. 2nd ed. Adolf Friðriksson, ed., (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), p. 418.
103. *Ibid.*, pp. 417–418.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 419.
105. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000) pp. 183–184, K233.
106. *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, Theodore M. Anderson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans. Islandica 51 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 346, ch. 71. C.R. Unger, ed., *Morkinskinna, Pergamentsbog fra Første Halvdel, af det Trettende Aarhundrede* (Oslo: Christiania, 1867), p. 186.
107. *Völuspá* in *Poetic Edda*, v. 2., Ursula Dronke, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 9, st. 8.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 23, st. 58.
109. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Víglundar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1959), pp. 67–68, ch. 4.
110. Andrew Dennis et al., trans. and ed., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, v. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 156, K92.
111. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 50, ch. 15.
112. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 43, ch. 15.
113. *Ibid.* (Var þar skipat saman þeim, sem jafnsterkastr váru...)
114. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 115, ch. 43.
115. Sigurður Nortal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 99, ch. 40. (En er þeir kómu á leikmót, þá var mönnum skipt þar til leiks...)
116. *Ibid.* (Egill hlaut at leika við sveinn þann, er Grímr hét...)
117. *Ibid.*, p. 100, ch. 40. (Grímr hafði þá hent knöttinn ok rak undan, en aðrir sveinarnir sóttu eptir.)
118. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 43, ch. 15.
119. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 50, ch. 15.
120. Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1936), p. 43, ch. 15.
121. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 58, ch. 18.
122. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Þorskfirðinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1991), p. 181, ch. 2. (Þá er þessir inir ungu menn óxu upp, er nú váru nefndir, lögðu þeir leika með sér á Berufjarðar ísi, ok var með þeim fóstbræðralag mikit. ... En um veturinn léku þeir knattleika á Þorskafjarðar ísi ok kómu þar til synir Hallsteins ok Djúpfríðingar, Þorsteinn ór Gröf ok Hjallasveinar.)

123. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), pp. 57–58, ch. 18.

124. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 115, ch. 43.

125. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 99, ch. 40.

126. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnauðgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 436, ch. 172.

127. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 115, ch. 43.

128. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 57, ch. 18.

129. Ibid., p. 58, ch. 18. (... en konur sátu upp í brekkuna.)

130. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 43–44, ch. 15.

131. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 112–113, ch. 41.

132. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, Íslensk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), pp. 144–145, ch. 13. (Bjarnfeld einn stóran höfðu þeir fyrir skinn ok vöfðu hann saman ok köstuðu honum á milli sín fjórir, en einn var úti, ok skyldi sá ná. Ekki var gott at vera fyrir hrundningum þeira.)

133. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 99, ch. 40.

134. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Flóamanna saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1991), p. 250, ch. 10. (Sveinar sögðust hafa sammælt á, at sá einn skyldi at leiknum vera, er nökkuru kvikindi hefði at bana orðit.)

135. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), pp. 99–100, ch. 40.

136. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 235–236, ch. 72. (Grettir seildisk aptr yfir bak Þórði ok tók svá í brækrnar ok kippði upp fótunum ok kastaði honum aptr yfir höfuð sér, svá at hann kom at herðum niðr, ok varð þat allmikil fall.)

137. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Kjalnesinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1959), p. 35–37, ch. 15.

138. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska forn-

ritfélag, 1934), pp. 116–117, ch. 40. (“Þú ert sundfærr vel, eða ertu at öðrum íþróttum jafnvel búinn sem at þessi?”)

139. Snorri Sturluson, *Magnússona saga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslensk fornrit v. 28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1945), p. 259, ch. 21. (Þá mælti Sigurðr konungr, “Muntu, hversu fór um sundit með okkr? Ek mätta kefja þik, ef ek vilda.” Eysteinn konungr segir, “Ekki svam ek skemmra en þú, ok eigi var ek verr kafsyndr.”)

140. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 161.

141. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 99–100, ch. 29.

142. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 150, ch. 59.

143. Ibid., pp. 150–151, ch. 59.

144. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), pp. 99–100, ch. 12.

145. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Hallfreðar saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 142, ch. 2. (Valgerðr tók knötinn ok lét koma undir skikkju sína ok bað þann sökja, er kastat hafði. Ingólfr hafði þá kastat; hann bað þá leika, en hann settisk niðr hjá Valgerði og talaði við hana allan þann dag.)

146. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu*, Íslensk fornrit v. 3. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), p. 60, ch. 4.

147. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 143.

148. Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1956), pp. 40–41, ch. 12.

149. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Fljótsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1950), p. 254, ch. 13. (Hreiðar sat við fornsögu, til þess er liðit var dagsetr.)

Chapter 11

1. Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* in *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, v. 1, Anthony Faulkes, ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 5. (En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúá á heiðin goð...)

2. *Locasenna in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1936), pp. 96–110.

3. *Prymsqvíða in Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 111–115.

4. Anthony Faulkes, ed., *A New Introduction to Old Norse: Part II Reader*, 3rd ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), pp. 127–129.
5. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 94.
6. Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Angela Hall, trans. (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), p. 208.
7. Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* in *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, v. 1., Anthony Faulkes, ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), pp. 3–5.
8. *Hávamál* in *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Gustav Neckel, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 33–34, st. 104–110.
9. Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age* (New York: Dorset, 1967), p. 180. R. I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 95–96.
10. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), p. 358, S355.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 270, S237.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 273, S241.
13. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 20, ch. 12.
14. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1950), p. 99, ch. 2. (Hrafnkell elskaði eigi annat goð meir en Frey, ok honum gaf hann alla ina beztu gripi sína hálfa við sik.)
15. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1935), p. 7, ch. 4. (Þórólfr Mostrarskegg fekk at blóti miklu ok gekk til fréttar við Þór, ástvin sinn, hvárt hann skyldi sættask við konnung eða fara af landi brott ok leita sér annarra forlaga, en fréttin vísaði Þórólfi til Íslands.)
16. *Ibid.*, p. 8, ch. 4. (Eptir þat könnuðu þeir landit ok fundu á nesi framanverðu, er var fyrir norðan váginn, at Þórr var á land kominn með súlnar; þat var síðan kallat Þórsnes.)
17. *Ibid.* (Eptir þat fór Þórólfr eldi um landnám sitt, utan frá Stafá ok inn til þeirar ár, er hann kallaði Þórsá...)
18. *Ibid.*, p. 12, ch. 7.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9, ch. 4.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 8, ch. 4.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9, ch. 4.
22. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1943), p. 57, ch. 18. (... ok gátu menn þess til, at hann myndi Frey svá ávarðr fyrir blótin, at hann myndi eigi vilja, at frøri á milli þeira.)
23. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 119.
24. Bjarni F. Einarsson, “Blót House in Viking Age Farmstead Cult Practices: New Findings from South-eastern Iceland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), p. 154.
25. Ann-Lili Nielsen, “Rituals and Power: About a Small Building and Animal Bones from the Late Iron Age,” *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, Vágar Till Midgård 8, Anders Andrén et al., ed. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 243–247.
26. Gavin Lucas and Thomas McGovern, “Bloody Slaughter: Ritual Decapitation and Display at the Viking Settlement of Hofstaðir, Iceland,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 10(1) (2008), pp. 7–30.
27. Sigurður Nortal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1933), p. 125, ch. 49. (Eyvindr hafði vegit í véum, ok var hann vargr orðinn, ok varð hann þegar brott at fara.)
28. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1939), p. 48, ch. 17. (“Eigi er þat siðr at bera vápn í hofit, ok muntu verða fyrir goða reiði, ok er slikt ófært, nema bœtr komi fram.”)
29. *Ibid.* (... “ok því mun eigi jafnmikilla fyrir ván hefðanna,” — ok kvaðþat sannligast, at hann gæfi sverðit í vald hans ...)
30. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 236–238.
31. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1986), p. 313, H268.
- (Baugr tveyringr eða meiri skyldi liggja í hverju höfuðhofi á stalla; þann baug skyldi hverr goði hafa á hendi sér til lögpinga allra, þeira er hann skyldi sjálfr heyya, ok rjóða hann þar áðr í roðru nautsblóðs þess, er hann blótaði þar sjálf.)
32. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1941), p. 308, ch. 59.
33. Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og haugfé: úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 419–420.
34. Kirsten Wolf, *Daily Life of the Vikings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), p. 157.
35. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., Íslenzk fornrit v. 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1945), pp. 177–178, ch. 107.
36. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 251.
37. Björn K. Þorólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit v. 6

(Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1943), p. 36, ch. 10.

38. Ibid., pp. 50–51, ch. 15.

39. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 244–245. Adam von Bremen. *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* book 4, sections 26–27, in *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, Bernhard Schmeidler, ed. (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchandlung, 1917), pp. 257–260. (Sacrificium itaque tale est. Ex omni animante, quod masculinum est, novem capita offeruntur, quorum sanguine deos placari mos est. Corpora autem suspenduntur in lucum, qui proximus est templo. Is enim lucus tam sacer est gentilibus, ut singulae arbores eius ex morte vel tabo immolatorum divinae credantur. Ibi etiam canes et equi pendent cum hominibus, quorum corpora mixtim suspensa naravit mihi aliquis christianorum LXXII vidisse. Ceterum neniae, quae in eiusmodi ritu libationis fieri solent, multiplices et inhonestae ideoque melius reticendae.)

40. Snorri Sturluson, *Ólaf's saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., Íslensk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 316, ch. 67.

41. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 18, ch. 10. (Þar sér enn dómhring þann, er menn vátu dæmðir í til blóts; í þeim hring stendr Þórs steinn, er þeir menn vátu brotnir um, er til blóta vátu hafðir, ok sér enn blóðslitinn á steinum.)

42. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 263–264.

43. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 48, S12. (Hallr goðlauss hét maðr; hann var son Helga goðlauss. Þeir feðgar vildu ekki blóta ok trúðu á mátt sinn.)

44. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 246–256, ch. 78.

45. *Þrymskviða* from *A New Introduction to Old Norse: Part II Reader*, Anthony Faulkes, ed., 3rd ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), p. 132, st. 7.

46. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Kormáks saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1939), p. 288, ch. 22.

47. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 215–216, ch. 66.

48. Ibid., p. 200, ch. 61.

49. Ibid. (Dætr kvað hann Þóri eiga, ok hendi Grettir gaman at þeim, enda tóku þær því vel, því at þar var eigi margkvæmt.)

50. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4

(Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 94–95, ch. 34.

51. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 169–170, ch. 63.

52. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 224.

53. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1933), p. 107, ch. 44.

54. “The Tale of Thidrandi and Thorhall” from *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Viðar Hreinsson, ed. (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), v. 2, p. 461, ch. 2.

55. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 239, ch. 96. (... ok Þiðrandi, þann er sagt er, at dísr vægi.)

56. Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Angela Hall, trans. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), p. 186.

57. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 313, H268.

58. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), pp. 106–107, ch. 41. (“Þú munt vera maðr feigr,” segir Njáll, “ok munt þú sét hafa fylgu þína, ok ver þú varr un þik.”)

59. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ámundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit v. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1936), pp. 249–250, ch. 79.

60. Ibid., pp. 261–263, ch. 82.

61. Ibid., pp. 268–269, ch. 84.

62. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), pp. 50–54, ch. 20.

63. Ólafur Halldórsson, *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1995), p. 412, ch. 4.

(“Þetta er þess konar atferli at ek ætla í öngum atbeina at vera, þvíát ek em kona kristín.”)

64. H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp. 137–139.

65. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 155, ch. 62. (“Eigi skal þat,” segir Kolskegg; “njóta skal hann draums síns.”)

66. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1934), p. 91, ch. 33. (“En mikit er til at hygga, ef þetta allt skal eptir ganga.”)

67. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1970), p. 415.

68. Jón Jóhannesson *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth* Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 125.

69. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 232, S196.

70. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 250–252, S218. (Helgi var blandinn mjök í trú; hann trúði á Krist, en hét á Þór til sjófara ok harðræða. ... Helgi trúði á Krist ok kenndi því við hann bústað sinn.)

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140, S97.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 396, S399. (En þat gekk óviða í ættir, því at synir þeira sumra reistu hof ok blótuðu, en land var allheiðit nær hundraði vetra.)

73. *Ibid.*, p. 324, H280. (Ketill bjó í Kirkjubæ; þar höfðu áðr setit papar, ok eigi máttu þar heið nir menn búa.)

74. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1954), p. 259, ch. 101. (... þeir höfðu allir langfeðgar verit kristnir.)

75. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 257.

76. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar from Heimskringla*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. Íslensk fornrit v. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 303, ch. 53. (För þá konungr norðr í Víkina, ok bauð öllum mönnum at taka við kristni; en þeim, er í móti mæltu, veitti hann stórar refsingar, drap suma, suma lét hann hamlá, suma rak hann af landi á brot.)

77. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 128.

78. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 14–15, ch. 7.

(En hann varð við þat reiðr mjök ok ætlaði at láta meiða eða drepa ossa landa fyrir, þá es þar varu austr.)

79. *Ibid.*, p. 15, ch. 7.

(Vil ek eigi goð geyja;
grey þykki mér Freyja.)

80. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 131–132. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 14–15, ch. 7.

81. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 16, ch. 7.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 134.

84. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 16–17, ch. 7. (En síðan es menn kvómu í búðir, þá lagðisk hann niðr Þorgeirr ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvíldi þann dag allan ok nóttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð. En of morguninn eptir settisk hann upp ok görði orð, at menn skyldi ganga til lögborgis.)

85. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 136. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 17, ch. 7.

86. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 140.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

Chapter 12

1. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 131, S89.

2. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 99.

3. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 131, S89.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), pp. 13–14, ch. 6. (Peir fundu þar manna vistir bæði austr ok vestr á landi ok keiþlabrot ok steinsmiði þat es af því má skilja, at þar hafði þess konar þjóðarit, es Vinland hefir byggt ok Groenlendingar kalla Skrælinga.)

6. Siân Grønlie, trans. *Íslendingabók — The Book of the Icelanders Kristni saga — The Story of the Conversion*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series (XVIII). (London: The Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006), p. 23, endnote 57.

7. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 99–100.

8. Jakób Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit v. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1986), p. 132, S89. (... hann kallaði Groenland, því at hann lét þat menn mjök mundu fýsa þangar, ef landit hét vel.)

9. *Ibid.*, p. 132, S90.

10. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 100.

11. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), p. 175.

12. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland 1993), p. 12.

13. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 100.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

15. Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, eds., *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), p. 61.

16. James Graham-Campbell, ed., *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), pp. 222–223.

17. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grænlandinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 246, ch. 1. (“Óvitrlig mun þykkja vár ferð, þar sem engi vár hefir komit í Grænlandshaf.”)

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 246–247, ch. 1.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 248, ch. 2. (Sagði Bjarni frá ferðum sínum, er hann hafði lönd sét, ok þótti mönnum hann verit hafa óforvitinn, er hann hafði ekki at segja af þeim löndum, ok fekk hann af því nökkut ámæli.)

20. *Ibid.*, p. 253, ch. 3. (... ok gaf Leifr nafn landinn eptir landkostum ok kallaði Vinland.)

21. *Ibid.* (Svá er sagt, at eptirbátr þeira var fylldr af vinberjum. Nú var höggvinn farmr á skipit.)

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 255–256, ch. 4.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 257, ch. 5.

24. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1985), p. 423, ch. 8.

25. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grænlandinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 261, ch. 6. (Þeir höfðu með sér alls konar fénað, því at þeir ætluðu at byggja landit, ef þeir mætti þat.)

26. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 430, ch. 11. (Þeir þóttusk nú sjá, þótt þar landkostir góðir, at þar mundi jafnan ófriðr ok ótti á liggja af þeim er fyrir bjuggu. Síðan bjöggusk þeir á brott ok ætluðu til sins lands.)

27. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 216.

28. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grænlandinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 268–269, ch. 8.

29. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga Saga*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 104. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North*

Atlantic Saga (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 275. Gustav Storm, *Islandskr Annaler indtil 1578* (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift Institutt, 1978).

30. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), pp. 206–207, 275.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

33. Filson Young, *Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery* (London: E. Grant Richards, 1906), accessed from Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4116/4116-h/4116-h.htm#ch7>, on 12 November 2007.

34. Helge Ingstad and Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland* (New York: Checkmark, 2001). Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Discovery of a Norse Settlement in America: Excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, 1961–1968* (Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1977).

35. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 1213.

36. Birgitta Wallace Ferguson, “L'Anse aux Meadows and Vinland,” in *Approaches to Vinland*, Andrew Wawn and Þorunn Sigurðardóttir, eds., Sigurður Nordal Institute Studies 4 (Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001), p. 139.

37. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 214.

38. Birgitta Wallace Ferguson, “L'Anse aux Meadows and Vinland” in *Approaches to Vinland*, Andrew Wawn and Þorunn Sigurðardóttir, eds. (Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001), pp. 141–142.

39. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Grænlandinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit v. 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1935), p. 251, ch. 2.

40. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 215.

41. Páll Bergþórsson, *The Wineland Millennium: Saga and Evidence*, Anna Yates, trans. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 107–108, 227.

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1. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 227.

2. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 288.

3. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur

Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 229.

4. Ibid., p. 230.

5. Ibid., pp. 281–282.

6. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* v. 2 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan Haukadalsútgáfan, 1981), p. 85, ch. 38. (En Snorri skyldi leita við Íslendinga, at þeir snerist til hlýðni við Nóreghöfðingja.)

7. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), p. 281.

8. Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 934 (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 317.

9. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, Haraldur Bessason, trans. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1974), pp. 271–272.

10. Ibid., p. 278.

11. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 85.

12. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar, trans. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1990), p. 289.

13. Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, Andrew Wawn, trans. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), p. 35.

14. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 89.

15. Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, *Icelandic: At Once Ancient and Modern*, Pamphlet 13 (Reykjavík: Ministry of Education, 2001), p. 13.

16. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 157–158.

17. Ibid., p. 159.

18. Gisli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason, ed.,

The Manuscripts of Iceland (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), p. 86.

19. Ibid., pp. 97–98.

20. Ibid., p. 109.

21. Ibid., p. 121.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 122.

24. Ibid., p. 145.

25. Ibid., pp. 145–147.

26. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 192.

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5. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).

6. Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

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